Super

KC Concepcion's Paris diary/pictorial: From whites to warmth

Metro

Japanese tenant reportedly employs 27 cop escorts

Elan

Margarita Forés is a foodie, doting mom and lover of retro

News / A2

Gov't, MILF resume peace talks April 16 in Kuala Lumpur

Sat Special

At 88, Paul Newman to make last movie before retiring

Marquez gives Morales tips on how to beat Pacquiao

By Recah Trinidad

LAS VEGAS—Erik Morales will not back down because Marquez don't step back during a fight.

"Never, never," Morales swore during the fight press conference where he also praised Manny Pacquiao as a good, strong fighter.

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER
BALANCED NEWS, FEARLESS VIEWS

Solons in exodus to Vegas in aid of boxing match

By Michael Lim Ubac and Cid Cabucungan Jr.

Saturday, March 19, 2005 | 48 pages | vol. 30 | no. 181

Holy Week plot real–PNP

PNP bares sketches, names of 'bombers'

By Luige A. del Puerto and Lolita B. Salaverria

THE THREAT of bombings is real, top police officials declared in a hastily called press conference yesterday.

Chief Supt. Ismael Rubiran, head of the Philippine National Police's Intelligence Group, said Abu Sayyaf leader Khadafy Janjalani "embraced" his self-styled followers to immediately bomb key cities, particularly in Metro Manila, after the killing of three of the group's top leaders at Camp Bagong Diwa on Tuesday.

"They're paranoid. They're determined. They're willing to kill and be killed," PNP Director General Arturo Lomibao said.

As though taking a cue from the warning, Undersecretary of Justice Prosecutor Ansar Mundula, the PNP chief warned of attacks by seven Abu Sayyaf members during the Holy Week.

"What is important here is we have to pass the sketches to the people, if only to exhaust the public ... [that the threat is serious and] we are not taking it lightly," Lomibao said, adding:

"[We made this disclosure] so that, when anything happens, they won't say [there was] no intelligence bulletin."

Lomibao named the supposed bombers as Khadafy Janjalani (Commander Robot), one of the Abu Sayyaf brothers killed in the police assault that ended the crisis, may have provided the money used to allegedly lure the friendship of prison guards and facilitate the use of mobile phones by ASG suspects to plot their escape.

Senior Supt. Roberto Lucas Jr., the head of the team probing the attempted jailbreak on Monday and the bloody jailbreak assault that ended the siege the next day, said he could identify the three were seen leave on the part of the jail guards.

HOMES FOR HOMELESS BADJAOS
President Arroyo inaugurates a housing project in Barangay Kalay Dano in Lamitan, Basilan, as part of the government's shelter for all program.

GMA calls special session to tackle VAT

By Christine Avendaño, Michael Lim Ubac and TJ Burgonio

WITH THE Senate failing to pass the value-added tax bill yesterday, President Macapagal-Arroyo has called for a three-day special session of Congress immediately after Holy Week.

The President issued a proclamation early last night calling Congress to a special session from March 30 to April 1 in order to pass the bill restructuring the VAT system.

The Senate adjourned yesterday without passing the VAT bill, apparently because of tensions between Senate President Franklin Drilon, but added that he was open to the holding of a special session.

"That is the President's prerogative. Under the Constitution, she can call a special session and we just have to accede. We will work until noon [each before April 1] if she calls a special session," he said.

Invoking his power under Section 15, Article VI of the Constitution in calling for the special session, the President underscored the need to pass the VAT bill, saying it was "imperative" in maintaining the recovery of the country's fiscal condition, achieving domestic stability and improving investor confidence.

Jailbreak probers focusing on collusion

By Luige A. del Puerto and Armand Nocum

THE ESCAPE attempt by the Abu Sayyaf detainees at the Metropolitan Detention Jail in Taguig was a well-planned operation that may have been greatly aided by the laxity of the jail guards inside the maximum-security facility.

Ghalib Andang (Commander Robot), one of the Abu Sayyaf leaders killed in the police assault that ended the crisis, may have provided the money used to allegedly lure the friendship of prison guards and facilitate the use of mobile phones by ASG suspects to plot their escape.

Senior Supt. Roberto Lucas Jr., the head of the team probing the attempted jailbreak on Monday and the bloody jailbreak assault that ended the siege the next day, said he could identify the three were seen leave on the part of the jail guards.

Moro solon hits PNP, DOJ for fueling hate

By Philip C. Tubeza and Luige A. del Puerto

ZAMBOANGA Rep. Maria Clara Lobregat yesterday urged authorities not to make premature statements that would serve to heighten tensions between Muslims and Christians.

Lobregat's statement came after the 97th anniversary of the Jolo bud massacre, likewise celebrated in particular Armed Forces spokesperson Lt. Col. Buenaventura Pascual for his statement that the 22 prisoners killed in the police assault on a building in Camp Bagong Diwan in Taguig all were to hell.

"We should not have said that since only God can say who went to hell or heaven," said the Muslim party-list representative. "The only basket for situation seems. Let us not make statements that would only exacerbate the misconception between Christians and Muslims."

Lobregat said not all Muslims believed that the 22 suspected Abu Sayyaf members killed in the assault were martyrs.

He said there was no consensus on that effect in the Muslim community, and pointed out that it was the dead men's families who insisted that their bodies not be washed before burial and that they be considered martyrs. ("Muslim martyrs).

"The ethical rules were at the funeral were done because they wanted to comply with the dead men's relatives," Lobregat said.

He said this did not mean that the muslim

EMBOGUE with Muslim brothers: PNP chief, Director General Arturo Lomibao (3rd from left) and MILMPO Chief Ibrahim Bazar (extreme left) hold a consultation meeting with the Moro Manila Muslim Peace and Order Coordinating Council on Friday. Bazar had been meeting meetings with Muslim leaders regularly ever since the violent incident in Camp Bagong Diwa in Taguig.

US to deport Lacson aide, says NBI exec

THE FUGITIVE ex-police officer surrendered his enforcement to the Department of Justice and was recently arrested in New York City may soon be deported to the Philippines.

Michael Ray Aquino is now being processed by the Department of Immigration and Naturalization, Immigration and Customs Enforcement, and not by the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

"We received the information regarding Aquino on Tuesday from the FBI and [then]

No way Malacañang supporting divorce bill

By Christine O. Avendaño and Cleimar V. Esguerra

NO WAY.

This early, the Arroyo administration has put its foot down on the prospect of legalizing divorce in the country where the predominant faith is Roman Catholic.

Press Secretary Ignacio Bunye yesterday said Malacañang was not inclined to support the bill filed by party-list Rep. Glen Mata in the House of Representatives that seeks to legalize the dissolution of marriage.

"I think this is not in line with the current thinking of the [Palace]," Bunye told reporters in Malacañang, in reaction to Mata's divorce bill.

The press secretary acknowledged that the divorce bill has its pros and cons. But he stressed that the Palace's stand had always been "pro-life" and "pro-family" and that was why he did not think the divorce bill would get Malacañang's nod.

President Macapagal-Arroyo is known to be a devout Catholic.

Mata, a member of the militant

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

SATURDAY, MARCH 19, 2005

Second FRONTPAGE

WEATHER FORECAST

Expect more oil price hikes, say oil players

By Clarissa S. Batino

THE COUNTRY'S oil players warned the public yesterday to brace for larger and more frequent increases in the pump prices of petroleum products, claiming they have yet to recover more than P9.0 per liter in costs despite the series of oil price increases this month alone.

Caltex Philippines Inc. and Pilipinas Shell Inc. yesterday raised gasoline prices by 50 centavos per liter. A day before, smaller oil players jacked up pump prices by the same amount.

Caltex said it had to increase gasoline prices due to the continued rise in the prices of crude and refined products in the world market.

"We will continue to maintain the discount for public utility vehicles as ordered," Caltex marketing [illegible] said in a statement.

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"We will continue to maintain the discount for public utility vehicles as ordered," Caltex marketing [illegible] said in a statement.

The increase was the third for the month and 38th for the year, totalling about P2 per liter for gasoline and nearly P4 per liter for diesel-based fuels like diesel and kerosene.

Oil firms said there would likely be another price hike before the end of March as crude oil prices scaled fresh highs on Thursday, prompting the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries to consider another increase in oil production to ease a worsening supply crunch.

Since Dubai crude oil was traded in 1983, never has the price shot up in $47 per barrel. We need to recover a total of about P10.35 per liter. But we are sensitive enough not to implement that on one blow. We will cushion the impact of the rising oil prices for as long as we can by implementing the price adjustment on a staggered basis," said Glenn Yu, vice president of the Independent Philippine Petroleum Companies Association.

Yu said a twice-weekly hike in pump prices was being considered to help the players recoup their costs.

The price of Dubai crude last gave up on an average of $44.93 per barrel this month against $39.65 in February and $37.92 in January, for the year, the price of crude had averaged at $40.89 per barrel against $30.65 per barrel for the whole of 2004.

Yu said a longer cut price hike is inevitable as diesel price in Brunei (Pacific Singapore or MOPS, a benchmark for international trade) or equivalent to 56.40 per liter.

He said gasoline price to MOPS was by $5 per barrel or equivalent to P2.45 per liter.

Gov't, MILF peace talks start on April 16 in KL

By Christine O. Avendaño

THE DATE for the start of formal peace talks between the Philippine government and Moro separatists had been set, ending months of speculation over whether the talks would start at all following periodic clashes between the guerrillas and government soldiers.

Silvestre Afable, chief government negotiator, said teams from the government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) would begin the talks in Kuala Lumpur on April 16.

"President Arroyo is backing the peace talks with full political will and everybody on board wants to respond with strong assurances," Afable said in a press conference.

He said Al Haj Murad, MILF chair, confirmed to him the date of the start of the talks in a four-hour meeting in Cotabato in Sultan Kudarat, Maguindanao.

Afable quoted Murad as saying the MILF negotiating team "has been organized and is ready to be fielded in the talks."

The government panel, he said, was also ready to face the thorniest issues in the talks, including that on ancestral domains.

The country's Muslim minority says its members were displaced of their land after Spain, and later the United States, the former colonial powers, introduced the western concept of titling property.

Afable said Jose Ommen Ibn Abd. Razak, director general of the Prime Minister's office of Malaysia, facilitated and attended the meeting with Murad.

Afable quoted Dato Othman as announcing Malaysia's "unwavering commitment" to host the talks, host an international Monitoring Team (IMT) and accept MILF nominees for post-peace talks programs in Malaysia.

He said the government and MILF "were grateful for Malaysia's involvement in the 'full nexus' of the peace process, together with Brunei and Libya in the IMT."

Afable said the government and MILF acknowledged the success of an existing truce and the organizations' efforts to help fight lawlessness in Mindanao.

Afable said both sides agreed with the Malaysian government "that absolutist goalsell has been removed in the ceasefire."

Both sides have been observing a ceasefire for the past 10 months, announced by a 62-member Malaysian-led international contingent, but the only negotiations during that period have been informal meetings.

"The MILF chair is committed to a sincere partnership with the government to work for a final solution to the conflict and I have utmost confidence that the MILF General Committee and the MILF peace panel will bring this process to logical conclusion," Afable said.

He said he and Murad also discussed a range of issues in the peace process, including a bigger role for the Bangsamoro Development Agency and the need to involve more ordinary people in the negotiations.

Last week, Executive Secretary Eduardo Ermita said the MILF had pledged in the agreement signed with the government in December last year to help fight terrorism and criminality. Ermita cited as proof of the MILF commitment the rebel group's help in the arrest of kidnapping suspects in rebel area.

In Lumbayao City, President Macapagal-Arroyo issued a statement Wednesday expressing her desire for lasting peace and development in Mindanao to win the war against poverty on the island.

"We must complete our lasting peace to enable our people to gain jobs and fight grinding poverty," Ms Arroyo said. "We want peace to allow our people more space to develop their human potentials and values. We want peace that upholds the law and respects the rights and traditions of our diverse ethnic communities."

The President also vowed to pursue the rehabilitation of areas in Muslim Mindanao that had suffered as a result of clashes between government forces and a combined force of the rebel Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters and followers of jailed Moro leader Nur Misuari, chair of another rebel faction, the Moro National Liberation Front.

"That's why in Mindanao today especially in Jolo, we are dealing with terror with an iron hand, and seek in Jolo with rebels and insurgents with whom we are waging peace across the negotiating table," the President said. With reports from Inquirer wires

Malacañang hits US for 'dirty money' tag

By Sec. Cabacungan Jr. and Philip C. Tubeza

REUTERS

WHAT is the US government up to?

Malacañang yesterday warned the US State Department for its report tagging the Philippines as a major money laundering point.

Press Secretary Ignacio Bunye said the US State Department's move was in direct conflict to the Paris-based Financial Action Task Force's decision to drop the Philippines from its list of countries which are notorious for laundering funds coming from criminal activities, specifically drugs.

Last February the FATF, the international anti-money laundering watchdog, that includes the US, removed the Philippines from its watchlist after the country complied with the watchdog's requirements such as tougher legislation and stricter enforcement of anti-money laundering measures.

Bunye said that the US Department also "contradicted" the US Ambassador's assessment on the Philippines. "The US (State Department) is saying that we have to go back to the dirty laundry list because of narrative threat but the US Ambassador claimed that they are reducing their aid to the country because terrorist threat is going down," Bunye said in a briefing in Malacañang.

"Clearly the right hand does not know what the left hand is doing," Bunye said.

The US State Department retained the Philippines on its list of "primary concern countries," partly because insurgency groups in the country were reportedly being bankrolled by money from the illegal trafficking of drugs and ammunition.

The US State Department also cited the growth of the illegal drug trade in the Philippines to a $1 billion a year industry with deepening links to organized crime groups in China, Hong Kong and Taiwan.

In Congress, US state legislators' action drew angry reactions from legislators.

Cebu Rep. Antonio Cuenco, chair of the House committee on foreign affairs, and Davao Rep. Vicente Garcia, a member of the House committee on economic affairs, said the US report was baseless because even the FATF on Money Laundering removed the Philippines from its watchlist two months ago.

"It's time to take a hard look at the US' motives for unfairly tagging the country as a major money launderer. This is totally unjustified for, it is not supported by facts," Cuenco said.

The two lawmakers said the Philippines' efforts to curb money laundering had borne fruit with the "positive decision" of the FATF. They said the US State Department should have considered the cash freeze decision before making its report.

They also said the cited problems of drugs and insurgency were beneficiaries basis for the tag, and pointed out that the report had also ignored the Philippines' progress in tackling those problems.

China's Jintao due in Manila

CHINESE President Hu Jintao is to visit the Philippines from April 26 to 28, the Department of Foreign Affairs said Friday.

"Our relationship with China is one of our most valued ties. It is a relationship shaped by centuries of interaction between the Filipinos and Chinese peoples," Foreign Secretary Alberto Romulo said, without specifying the agenda of Hu's visit.

Among the six rival claimants to the Spratly Islands in the South China Sea, the Philippines and China have improved ties in recent months amid rising bilateral trade.

They agreed with fellow claimants Vietnam earlier this month to conduct a joint survey of the oil potential in disputed areas of the South China Sea.

Manila and Beijing also agreed last year to hold annual security talks. AFP

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DOJ seeks Roldan transfer to jail

By Edson C. Tandoc Jr.

HOLD the proceedings and transfer actor and former congressman Dennis Roldan to the Pasig City Jail.

This was the request of the Department of Justice in a comment filed before the Pasig City Regional Trial Court yesterday.

Roldan, whose real name is Ritchie Yap Gonzalez, is the alleged mastermind in the abduction of a 3-year-old boy for months. He is still detained at Camp Crame.

In their comment, state prosecutors opposed the motion to suspend the proceedings Roldan had filed earlier.

Instead, they asked the Pasig City RTC branch 164 to issue a commitment order against Roldan, and transfer him to the Pasig City Jail.

A day after the case was raffled off to the court, Roldan's lawyers immediately filed a motion to suspend the proceedings, and requested that the case be brought back to the justice department for preliminary investigation.

Roldan had also asked the court to withhold the issuance of an arrest warrant against him.

The defense had claimed Roldan was denied his right to a preliminary investigation.

But in their reply yesterday, the prosecutors said a preliminary investigation had been conducted for Roldan and the other suspects.

Roldan had also petitioned a Quezon City court to quit his return from value he called a case of illegal detention and arrest. But the court had denied his petition.

Telling over the various moves for the accused Roldan before the court, prosecutors, in its objection that he just wants to be released on bail," the prosecutors said in its comment.

The defense would have to submit a reply to the prosecution's comment next week in order for the motion and branch clerk of court Roger Castillejos.

Meanwhile, another suspect in the abduction, Antonio Ocejalde yesterday claimed that he was tortured by police for five days to force him to sign a confession against Roldan. He said he refused the offer.

Ocejalde alleged he was brought to the Police Anti-Crime and Emergency Response office near Camp Crame on March 13 where he was one of his fellow suspects, a police official and private prosecutor Mario Bautista, and was told to sign a supplemental affidavit in exchange "for a lot of things."

THE ICEMAN COMETH
Ice cream vendors make more frequent stops in the neighborhood, and are a refreshing sight in the streets of the metropolis, especially with the advent of a long, hot summer.

BJMP head bats for new prison

By Norman Bordadora

THE DIRECTOR of the Bureau of Jail Management and Penology (BJMP) yesterday said that the serious concerns raised by the senior Taguig jailbreak tragedy would be addressed if a proposal to set up an integrated jail for Metro Manila were to be carried out.

The BJMP is now under investigation for alleged procedural lapses that gave detained Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) leaders the opportunity to escape and subsequently carry a portion of the Batasan jails maximum security area.

BJMP director Ameen Ahir said that if any good can be said to have come out of the bloody attempt to break out of the Batasan jail by the detained ASG leaders, it was to emphasize the need for a modern integrated jail for the national capital region.

"This is not to say that the Batasan crisis was a positive development for the penal system but it showed the need for an integrated jail," Ahir said in a phone interview.

The proposed Metro Manila integrated jail is intended for those inmates awaiting trial and who are being held in major city jails, including the Metro Manila District Jail in Bicutan, Taguig.

The Department of Interior and Local Government and the BJMP had been studying the proposed for a number of years.

At least four sites had been proposed for the integrated prison, Interior Undersecretary Marius Corpus said after said the most favored site is the police camp in Fort Bonifacio.

"The only problem with setting up such a modern jail facility is funding," Ahir said, underlining the financial problems of the BJMP which has had to make do with one jail guard for every 8,000 prisoners nationwide.

He said the BJMP is looking into getting the local governments of Metro Manila's towns and cities to help fund the facility.

The properties on which the jails now stand would then be used for other purposes by the cities and towns, he said.

Watch out for this scam artist

By Nob Cutiyog

ALLEGED scam artist based in Silliman, Quezon City, is posing as a United Nations official to access money transfers to children humanitarian projects.

The Department of Foreign Affairs disclosed the operations of the alleged scam artist for to protect yuntes clients.

The DFA warned the public against a certain "Thomas Brewer" who has reportedly been accepting fund "courses" for the DFA Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

Contributions

The interests would be asked to deposit money in their own bank accounts.

Brewer, who claimed to represent "some Russians," to UN humanitarian projects from "donors."

They are then requested to transfer the funds immediately to OCHA's alleged account.

As of Feb. 1305, the victims would then be allowed to pocket "fee, percent" of the contributions they could transfer.

The accounts was apparently given as "compensation for their services," the hustlers office added.

False representation

Brewer had been misusing the UN name and logo while "falsely representing himself" as an OCHA official in phone or email correspondence with his potential victims, the department said in a statement.

The Philippine mission to the UN forwarded by Ambassador Lauro Baja Jr. alerted the DFA about the alleged scam.

Main office

The suspect allegedly operates from a "main office" in Diliman.

He was detained by the UN in New York where he discovered he had put up a website "identical" to the officials' OCHA site, complete with the UN name and logo.

Brewer would solve job search done to the website—www.ochaonline.org/—appearance.org.ml/—where they can download an "Employment Agreement" for done to fill up.

Unauthorized

"Mr. Brewer's correspondence and the 'Employment Agreement' located in the website are false and unauthorized by the UN and (hence) no relation with the international agency," the DFA said, quoting Baja.

Japanese using 27 policemen escorts?

By Armand N. Nocum

THE PRESIDENT of a condominium tenants association in San Juan has filed a complaint in the justice department about the presence of policemen allegedly from the Taguig City police force who served as guarding a Japanese who owns at least five units at the Goldland Tower Condominium.

Co-owners and tenants of the condominium building have also complained to Justice Secretary Raul Gonzalez that Shigeyuki Kato was guarded by at least 27 policemen, including a "Col. Ojeme," "Maj. Peralta," "Maj. Montemayor," "Lt. Edmund Gabo" who is reportedly assigned to the Traffic Management Group.

A list sent to Gonzalez by Philip de Belen, president of the condominium tenants association, revealed that other policemen guarding Kato as Police Inspector Teodoro Prospero Agustin, Rosel Hernandez, Joseph Pendela, Ethel Ramundelon, Rogelio Ramos, Francisco Agustin, and Ernie John Ramos, among others.

Gonzalez wrote Philippine National Police Dir. Gen. Arturo Lomibao reminding saying that Kato "is allegedly causing trouble in the condominium and maligning the prosecution of several high ranking police officers and military (PNP) personnel." He requested that Lomibao conduct an investigation on the matter.

Apart from the Japanese, he said he had been told that a 911 this Rodriguez had also requested. It figured in the marching of a private security guard in the building.

An initial check with the Bureau of Immigration showed that Kato had no security there, said Gonzalez, prompting him to instruct the BI to check if Kato may have entered the country using a "diplomatic passport."

"According to the complaint, Kato has police motorcycle escorts which he drives around town," he said, adding he had already reported the matter to Deputy Mayor Freddie Tiglao.

Police Supt. Ramon Rojas, Taguig police chief, however, said the names mentioned on the list were not in their roster of policemen. "We have only 279 policemen. We are severely understrained. How we can send out our men elsewhere when we are in dire need of here services?"

Collegian's new editor in hot seat

By Alexis Pape

THE PHILIPPINE Collegian, official student publication of the University of the Philippines in Diliman, Quezon City is being another controversy.

Three losing candidates are protesting the results of the recent electoral contest to choose the editor in one of the largest and most influential campus publications in the country.

Katrina Macapagal, John Paul Cabrera, and Marshall Bautista sent a protest letter dated March 9 to the board of judges headed by Prof. Josefina Encabo.

They claimed that the winner, Jean Paolo Calet, and student judge Francis Alvin Aldo were both members of the Upsilon Eta Nu Phi fraternity. Another student judge, Tara Ann Wee, was reportedly the girlfriend of another Upsilon member.

The protesters also alleged Calet did not follow the board of judges' instructions regarding the placement of the examinee's number. Instead of placing the number on the top left corner of the page, Calet put his name but at the top center of the page."

Also, Calet "distinctly capitalized all letters of the first few words in his news report."

The letter said, "All of these violate the result of the editorial examinations preliminary, if not examinations, the district marking made by Mr. Calet, unsupported (by) by relevant provisions in the Collegian guidelines, (it) questions the credibility of the results of the editorial examinations. Mr. Calet garnered by making the most markings in his examination (papers) despite the board of judges' instructions."

The three asked Encabo to do quickly (Calet and) to show the examinees' scores.

CSC anti-corruption drive begins at home

By Margie C. Ortiz

THE CIVIL Service Commission (CSC) is cleaning its own backyard first as it embarks on a campaign to weed out corrupt and inefficient government employees.

The CSC is consolidating with the Office of the Ombudsman (Ombo) to curb the proliferation of fake civil service eligibility, ties that lead to the employment of unqualified applicants to government agencies.

CSC chair Karina Constantino-David said the effort to cleanse the civil service ranks followed the recent discovery of the illegal activities of four former commissioners-employees.

"These employees conspired to undermine the most important aspect of the CSC: the recruitment of government personnel," David said.

The NBI has recommended the prosecution of Antonio Ignacio of 902, U.N. Leaguio St., Lapu Subdivision, Navotas; Quezon City; Elizabeth Solano of No. 8, Mahogany St., Eldorado Village, Quezon City; Ephraim Alfonso of No. 229 Pinay Ave., South Triangle, Quezon City, and Ferdinand Agustin of No. 51-B Arpad 23, Project 8, Quezon City.

The suspects were arrested on entrapment in the 2003 and 2004 CSC Computer Assisted Test (CAT) irregularities that benefited 52 examinees.

The investigation was prompted by a request for NBI assistance by Agnes Padilla, director of the CSC's National Capital Region.

A case worth watching

ON TARGET
Ramon Tulfo

HUTOR A. Barugal, a businessman, went to a car dealer, Nissan Gallery at Libis, Quezon City, and bought a Nissan X-Trail sports utility vehicle.

He brought cash as he would have a big discount. Nissan Gallery gave Barugal a receipt for the car purchase as well as a permit to get the vehicle out of the store.

But Nissan Gallery sales representative Sheila Dadivo would not accept the money from Barugal, saying he should pay directly to Rizalbanan Asia Pilipinas Inc. So Barugal went to Mandaluyong and paid for the car.

There was an agreement between Nissan Gallery and Rizalbanan that payments for cars sold by the former would be paid to Manbatan. Manbatan, you see, had ordered a number of cars from Nissan Gallery amounting to P139 million.

But Manbatan didn't pay Nissan Gallery P28 million for the cars.

Barugal, of course, didn't know that he was an unsuspecting buyer.

When Nissan Gallery filed a case for replevin, an action to recover personal property with the Quezon City regional trial court, law enforcement agents went to Barugal to confiscate his car.

But Barugal reminded them to part with the car he bought in good faith from Nissan Gallery. He reasoned that Nissan Gallery gave him the receipt and an exit permit for the Nissan X-Trail.

When he came to see for solace, Barugal was dismayed and gave back the car since he was issued a receipt for it by Nissan Gallery. I still like now not at least if the deal between Nissan and Manbatan were wrong. The importance thing is he paid for the car and he was issued a receipt.

The judge who issued the replevin order should have looked at the documents presented to him by Nissan Gallery before issuing the confiscation of Barugal's car.

Barugal, meanwhile, can't use the Nissan X-Trail because Nissan Gallery wouldn't issue him the deed of sale and other documents for registration with the Land Transportation Office (LTO).

Now, this is a very interesting case and is worth following.

An official at the Commission on Higher Education (Ched) has been accused of unethical practice in granting permits in running schools.

The Ched official and the chief of the official's secretary are working as consultants in a nursing college in Quezon City, according to some disgruntled nursing schools.

The nursing school was placed this official's boyfriend, a married doctor, as vice president upon the recommendation of the official.

But when another newly opened nursing school applied for a permit in Ched, Cheda, the same official rejected the application. Why? Because the new applicant would compete with the nursing school where she is employed as consultant.

Neat, huh?

Why does a Caloocan City judge continue to hold on to the theft case filed by a local businessman against Australian who turned him in as vice-commissioner on a railway project?

The judge disappointed recently in the motion of the Australian accused, as well as to quash the case after government prosecutors found no reason to pursue the complaint.

The country's image is again being tarnished in the international community because of this case.

MetroBriefs

Fire summer

SAN MIGUEL that the escalating number of fire incidents makes a volunteer's of the Bureau of Fire Protection Metro Manila, "a group of firefighters called on the national government yesterday to hold after summit than three inspection, citing the need for the foundation for Filipino Fire Fighters (FFF) said that for the month of March alone, more than 20 fires had already been reported. This fd is a "clear indication" that organizations composed of active firefighters and safety-minded citizens. The summit, Bureau action said, would include the unveiling of the new calendar Fire Code and other problems that surrounding the Bureau of Fire Protection, where some of the firemen are being "Through a fire summit, a safety calendar is necessary for all sectors of society," he said. —Rory C. Carvajal

World H.E. Day

THE PHILIPPINES joins the rest of the world in observing the Environment Conservation Day today with a symposium. "Forest Ecosystem, Energy Conservation Environment and Good Health" at 8:30 a.m. at the Bulwagang Kalikasan of the Philippine Science University Complex, Barangay Central, Quezon City. Sen. Manuel Villar, Environment Secretary Angelo Reyes and Philippine Business for the Environment Foundation executive director Emmanuel de Guzman will be present. —Rosemarie Vilar

For entrepreneurs

LISTEN more and interact with the city's movie-makers and businessmen. Join Lito Riñonla (Marian and Lolo Ju Pinoy's Favorite Rapist Tam at the Metro Legazpi City Campus, Rizal at the College of Saint Benilde Angelo King International Center in Manila.

Solons in exodus to Las Vegas in aid of Pacquiao's boxing

Front page A1

men are flying to the United States to watch the World Boxing Council senior featherweight championship fight between Manny Pacquiao and Erik Morales this coming night (Sunday morning, Philippine time).

The exact number of lawmakers could not be ascertained because both the committee on games and amusements and youth and sports have been silent on the reported exodus to America.

Iloilo Rep. Exequiel Ipanag Bautista could not be contacted because his cellular phone was switched off.

Ilocos Norte Rep. Imee Marcos refused to comment on the issue.

Rep. Mikey Arroyo (Lakas, Pampanga) had refused to join the trip.

"I heard about it, but I don't have [who are going]. I'm not part of the contingent," said the President's son after hoped his colleagues did not dip into the state government's resources to pay their way.

"If you're going to support Manny, that's good but not at the expense of the government and to answer's your case," said the young Arroyo.

He also questioned the timing of the trip due to the non-passage of the rules added tax bills, which are still pending in the Senate.

Nihongo Fil like to support my friend Manny, the special session is important," the young Arroyo said.

Several other congressmen, who could not be identified as of press time, will fly in with a flight today.

Mayo Abueva is, chair of committee on games and amusements, might make the trip if he cannot get another flight. He rather is confirmed for March 22.

But a staff member said Abueva's trip was a "personal" one as he would be accompanied by his family.

No authority

A congressman is given a $150 travel allowance per day and an all-expense-paid trip (transportation and accommodation) if he or she is on official trip.

But Rep. Joe Barbers, chair of the accounts committee, did not sign any travel authority concerning the Las Vegas match.

"Negative. Congressmen are going to watch the fight, but paying their personal funds. The trip was not sanctioned by the House," said Barbers who added that only he and Dr. Daniela could sign a travel order to authorize the release of House funds.

He said Alimurung had been issued a travel authority but it had nothing to do with the championship match.

He said congressmen could not even avail themselves of the travel allowance because the travel authority "must be signed and submitted to the committee on inter-parliamentary relations and diplomacy prior to the trip."

But he was quite on whether congressmen could budget the Speaker to sanction the trip upon their return.

Official meeting

Attached on his mobile phone, Plaza, who is also in Las Vegas, said he (Plaza) will be official because he's "going to Texas to meet with the Filipino community on March 24."

"This is an official trip. Congress paid for my plane ticket, [and] also gave me a $1,500 allowance," he said.

He said Pacquiao "must be pride of the country. We have to support him. I don't think we are a burden to our dollar in Congress."

He said Speaker Jose de Venecia was mulling over a special session starting Monday so that the incumbent committees member would utilize the measures prior to the adoption by the two chambers, seeing separately. (See story on Page A2.)

Finish him off fast

Malacañang is hoping that Pacquiao finish his Mexican opponent quickly, but not because it wants the Filipino boxing congressmen back in the country to attend a special session on social reforms.

"We hope this will be finished early. There is speculation that if it is not decisive, it could be risky [for Pacquiao] because of the judges," said Bunye in a briefing at Malacañang yesterday.

Best wishes

"But I believe Manny Pacquiao will win decisively," he said.

In the meantime, the press secretary has not forgotten Pacquiao's monumental clash with Juan Manuel Marquez last May which ended in a draw.

"We'd like to have a decisive victory for our countrymen," Bunye said. "We would like to send our best wishes to our champion that he might once more to win and bring honor to the country."

Las Vegas odds makers favor Pacquiao over his Mexican foe Morales.

Asked if he was worried that congressmen would be joining them in Las Vegas to either celebrate Pacquiao's win or ease the pain of his loss, Bunye said: "That's for them to take up with the House Speaker [De Venecia]." With a report from Nikko Dizon

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Marquez gives Morales tips how to beat Pacquiao

Front page A2

The two great gladiators meet in a 12-round super featherweight bout on Saturday (Sunday in Manila) at the MGM Grand Garden Arena.

Oh, no retreat, no taking back.

It could not, however, be determined if Morales is in full-blast exercise, would bookmakers allow betting three winning tips.

There's only one way Morales can survive Pacquiao.

He should resist the Cordian gambit.

How to do that?

Morales must not allow himself to be locked in a clinch.

This is no quick potency prescribed by a medicine man.

This comes from Juan Manuel Marquez, he with the dour tone in recent punishing.

Marquez definitely knows whereof he speaks

Not 100 victim

Marquez is not among Pacquiao's 37 knockout victims.

He's one of the few who have survived Pacquiao's barrel back hand left.

Marquez is fully informed of the exact tonnage behind those punches.

He had to get up three times last May to squeeze through into a controversial draw.

Marquez spent two more times, left there times to join the first round.

He knows and he's now telling Morales never to underestimate Pacquiao's punching power.

He (Pacquiao) can punch, Marquez stressed.

Deadly dangerous

"To be honest, I think he'll even be stronger at 130 than he was at 126," said Marquez.

That does it make Pacquiao deadly dangerous.

Marquez warned that Morales can't let Pacquiao get him out of his rhythm.

"Be prepared to keep him head on and keep him off you," stressed Marquez, the IBF and WBO featherweight champion.

Oh, Morales is a notorious slow starter.

So Marquez asked him to "better come out of the ladies room reanimated up and ready to fight."

Morales is also scheduled to study tonight television Pacquiao—and paid for it.

"I think he will come at Erik the same way he came at me."

Anyway, Marquez will not be around here on Saturday.

He will be home in Mexico City where he's currently training for his May 7 fight probably against Herar Perez.

Morales (47-2) has never been knocked out.

He has never been in serious trouble inside the ring.

But Marquez warned a knockout could happen.

That's if Morales assumes he can physically overwhelm Pacquiao [38-3-2].

Great ego to Mexico from a great fighting freedom.

But hold it.

Final advice

This final advice: Morales may have to seriously evaluate.

"All Pacquiao has is a left hand. If Erik can figure that out, he should be OK."

That's a deceptive proposition.

Because Pacquiao has trained long and hard to develop a right punch.

So fact, his famous Freddie Roach, fanciful that their newer weapon could be packed in the right hand.

Asked about the well-hyped Morales left, Roach replied:

"It's a right hook. Morales has a right hook, we will knock Morales with it."

Will Erik end up buying a losing tip?

Officials violating laws on environment face suits

ENVIRONMENTALISTS have decided to shift their battle from the streets to the courts.

The Bukluran ng Sagip Kalikasan (Alliance to Save Nature) is initiating citizens' suits against national and local government officials who violate or obstruct the implementation of environmental laws in the country.

Governor Joselito Mendiola Calimbas of Southeast Asia Windstorm Tropical Cyclone Warning Center (SAWTCWC) in Metro Manila said the agency has been issuing tropical cyclone warnings since 1964.

Calimbas

Jailbreak probers focusing on collusion

From page A1

Three of at least four guards near the jail during the initial stages of the jailbreak were "half-asleep, half-awake," said Lacanlalay, chief of the Criminal Investigation and Detection Group for Central Luzon, covering Metro Manila.

The three guards, JO2 Rogelio de la Cruz, JO2 Alexandro Salapare, both of whom died, and JO2 Alfred Labrin, who was critically wounded, apparently never had a chance, said Lacanlalay.

He quoted one witness, Abid Macarambon, a drug suspect who acted as a prison "trustee" and regularly brought the inmates their food, in saying that he passed the three guards at about 6 a.m. that Monday.

Macarambon found the guards slumped on a table, looking like they were only half-awake, said Lacanlalay.

Collusion eyed

Yesterday investigators released an initial report on the incident, revealing the first few moments when the escape attempt began until the time when authorities decided to hold a press conference.

The report said the investigators would be focusing their on the possible collusion between the murderers and the jail guards.

The possibility was being raised primarily because of the discrepancy in the number of firearms that were recovered in the aftermath of the siege, and the number of firearms taken from the duty and wounded SPMF personnel, Lacanlalay said in his report to CIDG Director Chief Supt. Reynerio Cagape.

The police said the Abu Sayyaf men wrestled away four short firearms from the jail guards, but seven short firearms were recovered after the assault, Lacanlalay said.

The assault by members of the Special Action Force on Tuesday morning killed 22 Abu Sayyaf suspects, some 27 hours after the unexpected jail break. A SAF officer also died in the assault.

Witnesses' account

Three of the most notorious Abu Sayyaf detainees—Binasing (Hilarious) Muktadir, Global (Sadness) Idjirabah and Sultan (Death) Abubing)—who authorities said were behind the jailbreakers died in the assault.

Based on the account of four witnesses, three of whom are detainees, investigators were able to piece together what happened on Monday morning.

Muktadir, known as "Binasing" became of his work in the kitchen, passed the half-asleep guards and went straight to the third gate, which he threw down.

Binasing Global, another "runner," held the key to the third gate. He opened it for Muktadir, Lacanlalay said.

Another guard, identified as "Hasan," was inside the B-MPF unit locks located on the right side of the cells near the third gate.

"The moment he saw Binasing, Hasan and Muktadir—were in, Hasan's group rushed them and held them inside," Lacanlalay said.

Other witnesses said it was at this point that they saw Hasan and his companions hitting and kicking Hasan.

Hasan's and his "core group" of followers then went into the barracks and disarmed Hasan. It was Radz Abdul Gani Hasan (Ka Lando) who took the gun. They locked Hasan and Hasan inside the barracks. Hasan and Hasan survived the siege and the police assault.

"That was gun one," Lacanlalay said.

Disarmed and shot

While Zia was going out, Global and Sultan were still inside the jail. The two Abu Sayyaf leaders were not part of the group that rushed outside although the police later accused them of planning the escape attempt with Hasan.

After disarming Hasan, Hasan, Ka Lando and at least two others went straight to the three guards.

They woke up the three guards, disarmed them, got all their weapons, and shot them," Lacanlalay said.

"Those were three guns, so we have five guns in all," he said.

There was a passageway leading to a gate on the left side of the jail complex. Hasan and his men took shooting, hoping to find their brethren just behind the wall.

But at least two guards, one positioned near the infirmary and another one on the tower, had been alerted by the shots.

Another guard, SPO4 Edgar Ocupa, rushed to the passageway, but the inmates got him first. When the smoke cleared, Ocupa lay slumped on the floor, dead.

The two guards, identified as jail officers SSG4 and Tabo, who were positioned strategically at the infirmary and the tower, shot it out with Hasan and his men, driving them back and killing one instance, Informer Usoji Abdullah Parida and Boy Mahmud.

Hasan and his men failed to get Dajao's gun, Lacanlalay said.

Members of the police's Special Action Force also responded, and helped drive the murderers back to their cells.

Original escape plan

Hasan and his men retreated. That's when the standoff started," Lacanlalay said.

Minutes later, the authorities set up the setup management committee.

Lacanlalay said the original escape plan was for the ASG suspects to escape by taking hostage the judge, prosecutors and stenographers during a hearing on their criminal cases scheduled for Monday before the Isabela Regional Trial Court, but the hearing was canceled at the last minute.

The hearing was canceled because Judge Agnes Loreto had applied for a 1-day break leave, said Lacanlalay, who is handling the kidnapping and serious illegal detention charges against about 100 ASG suspects accused of kidnapping 52 persons, mostly elementary students, in Tumbaling, Basilan, on March 21, 2000.

Robot enemy

Of the 136 ASG suspects detained on the Tipang palace, only thinking is known to have the courage, having allegedly gotten a large chunk of the loot, chuck of millions of pesos in ransom money that the kidnap gang got for the kidnapping of foreigners, said Lanaro.

"It is not far-fetched that he (Andang) could have financed the escape plot. The others do not have enough resources (if there)," Lacanlalay said.

He said that some months before the attempted jailbreak, the detained ASG were were seen flashing around a lot of money which they used to "paying" for the use of mobile phones of main prison guards.

"It was around this time that we learned that Hasan was using a mobile phone," he said, adding that Hasan may have contact a SIM card but was paying jail guards for the use of the latter's mobile phones.

High-fives

In a court hearing held five days before the failed jailbreak, Lanaro said Hasan was observed complimenting one of the guards and making high-fives with him. Hasan's one also seen putting his hand on the guard's shoulder.

Lanaro said he could not recall the guard's name, but he was certain that the guard was one of those killed by the ASG suspects last Monday.

"They appeared to be very close," he said of the ASG suspects and the slain guard.

Lanaro said he had given the information to the Intelligence Group of the Philippine National Police, as the IG could have the source of Andang's money traced through the Anti-Money Laundering Council.

He said General B. Rubarts, also Tipang who is suspected of staging the feb. 14 Makati bus bombing, had also informed him that the jailbreak would be done "on a Monday" and that it was to be executed while the suspects were at the hearing that Monday.

He said this scenario was deemed workable since about a hundred ASG cases were brought to trial/hearing with only a few prison guards watching them. With a report from Inquirer N. G.

GMA calls special . . .

From page A1

in the Philippines that will lead to the creation of more opportunities for our people."

3-week break

At the lower chamber, it seems there is no stopping House members from taking their three-week Lenten break.

Majority Leader Prospero Nograles said in a phone interview the House would oppose the holding of a special session just to pass miscellaneous in the SBT law.

Nograles said the House should not be blamed for the Senate's failure to pass its version of the VAT measure.

"We gave it our best shot. [The rule is] the ball is not finished, pass your papers," he said.

The Lower House adjourned Thursday night, effectively shelving final approval of the measure until Congress resumes sessions in April 11.

"We'll ratify it on April 11. But at least we can have a bicam [bicameral conference committee] during the break. Ratification will only take 30 seconds," Nograles said.

Ready for bicam

In anticipation of the passage of the measure in the Senate, the House already constituted a contingent for the bicam to be led by Nograles and Andi Lapus, chair of the House ways and means committee.

Should the bicameral conference succeed in reconciling the two versions in three days, the measure is in final form would be returned to the two chambers for separate adoption.

Only then can the President sign the bill into law.

Dillon said the failure to pass the SBT bill before the Holy Week recess would have no adverse repercussions on the economy.

"I don't think the economy will collapse if we take this up after the Lenten break," he said.

Dillon said the Senate leadership had no choice but to give Maligaya the "opportunity to clarify issues that she has not clarified" and Cayetano "more time to study the measure."

Senate Minority Leader Aquilino Pimentel Jr. rose to briefly interpellate Sen. Ralph Recto on the measure, which was passed on first reading last week.

Palace to blame

Administration Sen. Joker Arroyo blamed Malacañang for the Senate's failure to pass the SBT bill, saying it had not thrown its "full support" behind the measure.

He said the Senate might end up passing a "new VAT" bill, which would not answer the much-maligned government would get the revenues it needs.

The senator said the dilemma facing the Senate majority bloc was aggravated by Malacañang's silence on the issue.

While the House had increased the VAT rate from 10 percent to 12 percent and lifted some exemptions, the Senate wanted to retain the present rate but lift exemptions enjoyed by the energy sector, he said.

But Malacañang, although it earlier backed the House version, was unsure whether the Senate version could come up with the P80-billion target revenues, he said.

Arroyo said that since the Senate did not want to change the current VAT rate, its version of the bill could wholly on the lifting of VAT exemptions to come up with the needed revenues.

Zero VAT for IPPs

"But Malacañang gave us the signal that it doesn't want the lifting apparently to protect big businesses, so we yielded to it," Arroyo said.

Apart from seeking a 10 to 12 percent increase in the VAT rate, Malacañang was pushing for the retention of the zero VAT rate privilege enjoyed by the independent power producers, no more than 30% it on a staged withdrawal course with some remaining, said Arroyo.

Only the proposal to increase the corporate income tax from the present 32 percent to 35 percent would be left in the Senate version, retaining 2005 tax rate of only 30 billion, Arroyo said.

But the Senate would be forced to pass a measure which would not solve the government's fiscal problems, he said.

Satur bares plot vs Left in Congress

By Philip C. Tubeza and DJ Yap

Is Troll government out to oust the Left's representatives in Congress?

Bayan Muna party-list Rep. Satur Ocampo raised the question yesterday after another leftist activist was killed in Pampanga on Thursday night, bringing to 24 the number of militant activists killed in the first quarter of the year.

Victor "Tatang Ilet" Concepcion, 56, Arayat-Porac municipal coordinator in Mexico, Pampanga and ANGT secretary general, was allegedly killed in front of his son's home in Angeles City.

Ocampo said the killings, the changes in the government's peace panel, and the series of Manifesto Gonzales as National Security Adviser last month had raised concerns within the mainstream Left that the administration wanted to remove its representatives in Congress.

"We are trying to figure out what this means...Gonzales had said that he will neutralize leftist cases against Bayan Muna with the intention of denying us representation," Ocampo said.

"There seems to be a grand scheme to oust us from Congress," he added.

Gonzales had accused Bayan Muna and its allies that also have representatives in Congress—Anakpawis and Gabriela party-list groups—of funding the New People's Army, a charge the groups vehemently denied.

Ocampo also noted that the government changed the composition of its panel in the peace negotiations with the National Democratic Front although there were no scheduled formal negotiations.

He said Silvestre Bello III and Jose "Ajong" Yap were removed even though they had already established rapport with the NDF negotiators.

"Even (House 4th governor) Chavit Singson was told to lay off. He was trying to help in the negotiations," Ocampo said.

He said that since 2001, 49 Bayan Muna members had been killed. The circumstantial evidence in these murders point to the military's involvement in the killings, Ocampo said.

Anakpawis Rep. Rafael Mariano said Concepcion was "the 18th victim of political assassination in the first three months of the year. What's alarming is that the last eight victims were killed only in the last two weeks."

He added that the killing of Concepcion "confirms that there's a grand design and an underhand policy to eliminate leaders and members of the legitimate mass organizations and progressive parties."

Militant groups Bayan Muna, Anakpawis, Gabriela, Kilusang Mayo Uno and Bayan also accused the killing of peasant activist Concepcion and described the country's situation as "worse than martial law" during a forum yesterday at the University of the Philippines Asian Center.

In a statement, Ocampo noted the rising number of murdered activists was "shocking" and pointed to a similar period during the era of martial law.

"At least during martial law, it was declared. We know what organizations are outlawed. Today there are no formal declarations and yet it seems agents of the state target legitimate organizations, activists and even party-list groups," Ocampo said in a statement.

"During Martial Law, we at least knew what role of the Philippine Constabulary was involved, but now, there are no rules being followed, not even the benefit of an Arrest, Search and Seizure Order consistently lasted during the martial law days," said Bayan Muna Rep. Teddy Casiño in the same statement.

Concepcion's killing followed that of activists Joel Reyes and Ernesto Bang, who were gun down in Cagayan de Oro earlier this week.

The WORLD

Editor Lorenzo B. Gozon

6,000 Syrian troops pull out of Lebanon

BEIRUT—Syria completed the first phase of its troop pullout from Lebanon on Thursday, bringing Damascus closer to meeting US and Lebanese opposition demands that it quit the neighbor it has dominated for three decades.

A Lebanese security source said 4,000 to 6,000 Syrian troops had returned home since the pullout plan was announced on March 5, leaving 6,000 to 10,000 in eastern Lebanon.

He said all Syrian forces had pulled back to the Bekaa Valley or crossed into Syria. "There are just some logistics left. But the people were, all of them," he added.

United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan expects Syria to fully withdraw its forces before Lebanon's May elections, UN envoy Terje Roed-Larsen said after briefing Annan on his recent talks with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

Roed-Larsen declined to say if Assad had committed himself to that timetable.

In Washington, a US state department official expressed skepticism the Syrians intended to be out by May.

"I think they are keeping their options open and they are trying to keep from being cornered and be that means you have a disturbing lack of specificity," the official said.

The United States says a Syrian withdrawal is needed for the pro-Damascus elections to be fair and demands the disarmament of Shiite Muslim Hezbollah guerrillas.

But Hezbollah, which is backed by Syria and Iran, has vowed to keep its guns or fight Israel rather than confining itself to politics as demanded by UN Peacebroker Terje Roed-Larsen.

Deepening Lebanon's political crisis, key opposition leader Walid Jumblatt said he and his allies would not join a government as long as pro-Syrian President Emile Lahoud remained in office.

"To join them means to cover in a parasitical government headed by Lahoud who is controlling everything," he said in his palace in the Druze mountains. "Who is Lahoud? A Syrian puppet."

That stance would needs a bid to forge a unity government by pro-Syrian Prime Minister Omar Karami, who resigned on Feb. 28 under opposition pressure but was re-appointed last week.

Syria bowed to international demands for a troop withdrawal after huge Beirut street protests sparked by the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik al-Hariri in a Feb. 14 bombing.

A Lebanese-Syrian committee is to meet in early April to discuss any future Syrian presence, the security source said.

Rhetoric said the last two Syrian intelligence centers in the city of Tripoli were emptied at dawn. They were among the last to be vacated in northern Lebanon.

Syria's six colleagues, all close to Syria, were ready to go to court to disprove opposition charges they may have had a hand in Hariri's killing. Reuters

ALMOST back to normal—Sri Lankan teddy tapper Ajith climbs a coconut tree, helped by steps made of rope and coconut husks, to start his day's tapping in the tsunami-hit southern Sri Lankan village of Payagala Maradi (2). AFP

Funds for tsunami reconstruction short by $5.25B

MANILA—The cost of rehabilitation and reconstruction in four of the worst-affected countries by the tsunami disaster is short by $5.25 billion, the Asian Development Bank said Friday.

According to ADB data some $7.764 billion will be needed by India, Indonesia, Maldives and Sri Lanka for rehabilitation and reconstruction.

So far only $2.51 billion has been committed leaving a funding gap of some $5.25 billion.

The data is contained in a "Tsunami Recovery Tracking Matrix" which was presented Friday at a one-day international conference organized by the ADB at its Manila headquarters.

Those attending the conference included ministers from India, Thailand, Indonesia, Maldives, Sri Lanka; representatives from 28 ADB member countries; United Nations agencies; the World Bank; International Monetary Fund; Islamic Development Bank, the private sector and non-government organizations.

A spokesperson for the ADB said the matrix "is not definitive."

"There are still a lot of gaps that need to be filled in but it is a start.

"It is hoped it will be used as a fundamental planning tool for donors, affected countries, NGOs and the like to get a broad view of what is needed, where the aid is needed and how much will it cost."

According to the ADB's figures the cost for rehabilitation and reconstruction in affected parts of India is estimated at $1,212 billion, of which $793.3 million has been committed.

Indonesia will need $4.722 billion of which $672.8 million has been committed. Maldives will need $400.1 million with $187.3 committed and Sri Lanka $1.02 billion needed and $963.8 million so far committed.

Thailand was not included in the matrix as "it has not sought international assistance for rehabilitation or reconstruction needs," the ADB said.

ADB president Haruhiko Kuroda said at the opening of the conference that the distribution of the billions of dollars pledged for rehabilitation and reconstruction must be "predictable, transparent, strategic and effective."

"As the recovery effort now moves from initial relief to rehabilitation and reconstruction, it is essential to keep the world's attention focused on continued support and ensure that donor confidence in our efforts remains high," he said.

He told the conference that in India almost 700 km of roads were damaged.

In Indonesia's Aceh Province the livelihoods of 40 percent of the population are affected while in Sri Lanka, 100,000 homes were destroyed and 65 percent of the country's fishing fleet damaged or lost.

"These are just a few examples of the tsunami's massive footprint," he said.

"Clearly the rehabilitation and reconstruction needs across all sectors must be addressed in order to meet this huge challenge.

"Lessons learned from other large-scale disasters highlight the importance of establishing priorities and doing things in the right order." AFP

ACTIVIST Rebekah Gerber, 19, mours rape over her cousin, which expresses the silencing of Terri Schiavo, during a protest outside the Pinellas County Courthouse in downtown Clearwater, Fla. Gerber is with The Center, a non-denominational Christian activist group, protesting against a court's order to remove Schiavo's feeding tube. -AP

US in painful decision over right-to-die case

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - US doctors may on Friday turn off the feeding tube of a Florida woman who has been in a vegetative state for 15 years while her husband and parents fight over whether she should be kept alive.

A court has ruled the tube can be removed from 41-year-old Terri Schiavo on 13 pain but legislators, lawyers and physicians are trying to push legislation to stop the move and activist groups across America have taken up Schiavo's cause.

Schiavo's heart stopped in 1990 inflicting severe brain damage and she has been in hospital ever since. Doctors have said few consider it irreversible and her husband, Michael Schiavo, says he will told him she would not want to be kept alive artificially.

Her parents, Bob and Mary Schindler, have fought attempts to let their daughter die, insisting she could get better.

Experts have said Terri Schiavo would die in about two weeks if the tube is removed.

In the final hours, the parents and their supporters fought desperately to stop that happening.

They appealed to the US Supreme Court, and Florida Circuit Court Judge George Greer scheduled a hearing Thursday to consider a request from Florida to halt the removal of the tube.

The Florida House of Representatives passed a bill Thursday to block the withholding of food and water from patients in a persistent vegetative state who did not leave specific instructions regarding their care. The Florida Senate debated a different bill on the same topic.

The US Congress also passed civil measures that will unveil intense efforts to be made into next while legislators.

The House of Representatives voted late Wednesday to give federal courts the power to review cases where life support patients do not have written instructions on whether they want to be kept alive.

But the Senate on Thursday approved a measure that only mentions Schiavo and would allow a final modified review in her case. AFP

Verdict in Air India bomb case too late for mother

TORONTO (AP) - The 71-year-old Indian mother Wednesday that the hunt for justice was not long ago during the 20 years it took to investigate the bombing of Air India flight 182 and bring two Sikh activists in trial.

The mid-air explosion over the Atlantic off the coast of Ireland in 1985, the deadliest bombing of an airliner, killed 329 people, including Hari's son, grandson and daughter-in-law.

"Twenty years is not a small time. It's a very, very long time," she says in her Bombay home, holding a worn photograph of her son and his wife. "Most of the relatives of those died are also not alive."

"If the verdict had come out in 4-5 years, people could have hoped for something, but after 20 years it does not matter."

Judge Ian Bruce Josephson in Canada's British Columbia Supreme Court on Wednesday acquitted Sikh activists Ripudaman Singh Malik and Ajaib Singh Bagri of murder and conspiracy over the bombing of the flight en route from Canada to India.

"The verdict was the last straw that we were hanging by. It is a big let down," Dhanal S. Sorabji, a coordinator of the victims, said.

While anguished relatives of the victims rallied for a government inquiry, families of the two accused were elated.

"The court's verdict is great. We were hoping that he would be acquitted. We know that he could have never done such a thing, said Piara Singh Bagri's brother. "He have been fighting this case for so many years. We are very happy" Bagri's mother, Jiatan Kaur, another son and finally came home.

"We have been getting congratulatory calls since last night. We are very happy," said Surinder Kaur, one of Malik's aunts.

The 300-strong Canada-India Pushandhak committee, a leading Sikh religious body, also welcomed the acquittal.

"I want to congratulate both Malik and Bagri. We have our condolences for relatives of all the 329 people who were killed on board, but we are also happy for the justice given to both of them," Surinder Singh Mehta, a committee member said."

The 20-year probe into the Flight 182 attack and a related bombing hit killed two workers at Tokyo's Narita airport was about $1.14 million, but the judge ruled the evidence against the two Sikhs had "fallen woefully short."

Investigators allege the bombings were the work of Vancouver-based Sikh separatists seeking revenge for the Indian army's bloody 1984 storming of Sikhism's holiest shrine, the Golden Temple in the northern city of Amritsar.

Canadian authorities have not yet said if they will appeal.

"An appeal against the judgment when everything has been decided we don't it is not easy. The appeal should be for finding the culprit who has done it," B.S. Sandhu, brother-in-law of S.S. Bhinder, one of the flight's pilots. Reuters

Bush vows to help sisters of Belfast man killed by IRA

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - President George W. Bush promised to help the McCartney sisters from Belfast get justice for their slain brother, and encouraged efforts to put the Northern Ireland peace process back on track.

Bush on Thursday met the five sisters and fiance of Robert McCartney after stabbing Gerry Adams, leader of the Irish nationalist Sinn Fein party, who has been a traditional St. Patrick's Day visitor to the White House.

The McCartney family has received widespread political and media attention in the United States since arriving this week to press their campaign to bring their brother's killers to justice.

Members of the Irish Republican Army, a paramilitary offshoot of Sinn Fein, have been blamed over Robert McCartney's Jan. 30 murder.

"We praised to the president the importance of getting justice for Robert, and he said he's 100 percent behind our campaign," sister Catherine McCartney said Thursday.

"Ireland as a whole, and the peace process require justice for people back in Ireland," she said.

White House spokesperson Scott McClellan said the president praised the women's bravery and tenacity, confronting an armed Republican faction IRA that has been known to resort to violence and intimidation to silence opponents.

"The president thanked the McCartney family for their courage," McClellan said.

"He knows that their courage comes from their love. And the president let them know that he shares in their grieving over the loss of their loved one, and he expressed to them that justice will prevail."

The EU leader also promised unspecified help in bring their brother's killers to justice. AFP

US has been 'outsourcing' torture for 20 years–CIA chief

WASHINGTON—Suspected terrorists in US custody have been transferred to third countries for the past 20 years, US director Porter Goss told senators Thursday as the United States has come under fire for "outsourcing" torture to nations with questionable human rights records.

"I believe that if you go back and you take a look about transfers...helping other countries deal with terrorists—you will find this is a process that's been going on for more than 20 years," Goss told the Senate armed services committee.

"I know of no instances where the intelligence community is outside the law on this," he said.

Goss also said that "serious allegations" of suspects being tortured abroad that have been brought to the attention of the people and bodies have been referred properly for investigation."

"I know for a fact that torture is not productive. That's not professional interrogation. We don't do torture," he said.

On Wednesday, President George W. Bush said that his laws not support torture, and vowed that he received assurances from countries where CIA officials send prisoners that they will not be tortured.

However, Sen. Ted Kennedy, a leading Democrat, said Thursday he was skeptical about the assurances.

"Many of us are deeply concerned about the administration's secular attitude toward international law and the prohibitions against torture," Kennedy said in a statement.

Goss said the system is not transparent about Iraq, saying there had already been a manifest "change of thinking" in that country since the last, 30 elections.

Still, he cautioned, "I bring until all that...there is no mistaking the fact that there is still intimidation...willful intimidation...primarily not aimed at our forces as much as innocent people and the newly being stood up Iraq security and police forces. And that is, of course, mentioned by the terrorists."

The chief of military intelligence, Vice Admiral Lowell Jacoby, also said there had been some changes in the future in Iraq.

"Since the 30 January election, I believe we are some changes. Attacks had averaged about 80 per day and for the last two weeks dropped (to) approximately 50 per day and appear to be dropping still further, while Mosque-Emir assaults also below the high level of activity that existed last November," he said.

"It's necessary to say what this is a the trend. We need to be watchful and aware these changes as we see them evolve," Jacoby said.

Goss also rallied for the creation of a "national treasury of intelligence...not just for the CIA, but for all agencies within the intelligence community," he said for would present the proposal to national intelligence director John Negroponte after Negroponte is confirmed by the Senate.

"This will help to define a new intelligence community culture, better coordinate the way we do business across government and enhance a willing cooperation among all," Goss said.

In November, the White House urged the CIA to increase the number of its agents on the ground by 50 percent, as well as bolster the ranks of its analysts and language experts.

Goss said he needs more people with international experience. "I need cultural experience and background. I don't have, I need more diversification. AFP

FRANCO DISMANTLED
Workers remove the last remaining statue in Madrid of former Spanish dictator Francisco Franco's father, March 17. Spain's government recently took down the statue of Franco mounted on a horse, saying it was part of a larger symbolic program and that it was "not appreciated by the majority of the people."

Europe cool, aid groups dismayed over World Bank role for Wolfowitz

LONDON—European capitals reacted coolly Thursday to the nomination of US deputy defense secretary Paul Wolfowitz to be the next head of the World Bank, but aid groups voiced dismay and some pure horror.

Reaction to the surprise nomination ranged from the outright hostile—"a disaster," one critic said—to the timid, with diplomats cautious in their language.

In London, a spokesperson for Prime Minister Tony Blair's office said Britain would hold "consultations" about any appointment.

"We feel the Bank's board should decide on the appointment of the president of the Bank, and we are not going to get into a commentary on that selection process," he added.

Britain's finance minister Gordon Brown earlier hailed Wolfowitz as "a very distinguished person" but avoided other comment.

However, Britain's former international development secretary Clare Short described the nomination of an arch conservative seen as a key architect of the US-led war on Iraq "(US President George W.) Bush's choice to former Vice Youth was able to choosing "neo Bogota to the world," she said, referring to a vulgar British gesture.

"This is really shocking. It's as though they (the Americans) are trying to wreck our international systems," she told Channel 4 news.

In Brussels, a European Commission spokesperson said it hoped the next World Bank chief would "put development at the center" when in office, adding that Wolfowitz stands down later this year.

His dodged a question on whether European nations, deeply divided over the Iraq war, would try to scupper Wolfowitz's appointment, pointing out that the nomination—the unanimity of the 25 member European Union—"is not over the board" of the Bank.

French foreign minister Michel Barnier called the nomination a "proposal" which would be examined.

Germany's development minister Heidemarie Wieczorek-Zeul noted that "the millionaire in old Europe is not exactly overwhelming."

"Should the European will be able to back up George W. Bush probably deemed a strong European leaders' Iraq than and possibly over Jacques Chirac," Peace Consortium, director of studies at the European Policy Centre in Brussels, said.

"It appears to be a done deal," Jerome Sgard, of the Paris-based International Information and Prospective Studies Centre concurred.

The head of the Swiss branch of the anti-globalization group Attac, Jacques Wiesnall, said the nomination of Wolfowitz—architect of the US invasion of the United States to maintain its control of the World Bank, not to develop its original mission, which is to promote development, but to incorporate it into its political military strategy".

"I think this will trigger many negative reactions actually from the country's countries and from poor countries," he said.

Some critics called for an overhaul of the "gentlemen's agreement" process under which the World Bank chief is generally nominated by Washington and the head of the International Monetary Fund by European.

"Governments should abolish the unspoken 'gentlemen's agreement'," said Barnaby Phillips, head of public affairs at Save the Children UK. "He clearly the Bank administration is going to put a Bush appointee into to little Bolshevik the World Bank." AFP

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Israel, Palestinians promise to extend truce

SHARM EL-SHEIKH — Israel and the Palestinians pledged Thursday to observe an informal truce until the year-end although militants at a rapid pace of clashes during the full marathon the international community had hoped for.

All 13 major factions agreed on the conditional period of calm at summit talks president sent by Palestinian leader Mahmud Abbas in the Egyptian capital.

"The participants have reached an agreement on a political program until the end of the current year which means their commitment to respecting the atmosphere of calm currently prevailing in exchange for an end to aggressions against our people," they said in a Cairo Declaration.

Israel immediately vowed to continue to refrain from military offensives as long as the Palestinians observed a de facto peace, in keeping with a promise made at a summit in Egypt's Red Sea resort of Sharm el-Sheikh last month.

Prime Minister Ariel Sharon welcomed the Palestinian decision to observe a lull as a "first and positive step" in a telephone call with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak who hosted both on the talks.

"But if we want to progress in the peace process, the problem of the terrorist groups must be solved," he continued, describing the factions' agreement as "temporary."

A Sharon aide said Israel would not launch any military offensives in the occupied Palestinian territories as long as the armed groups abided by the truce.

"At the Sharm el-Sheikh summit, Israel agreed not to launch offensive operations as long as there is a complete end to violence on the Palestinian side and we are sticking to that commitment," said the official.

Israel has repeatedly demanded that armed groups be dismantled in keeping with the roadmap peace plan, which the international community has been building to restore amid a new found optimism in the Middle East.

Palestinian faction leaders have stressed the difference between unveiling the cooling down period they have observed since Sharon re-elected Israel's prime minister in a truce, for which they would make concrete demands of Israel.

The Cairo Declaration came as Egyptian-Israeli relations took a step forward Thursday with the arrival of Cairo-recently appointed ambassador to Israel after a four-year diplomatic freeze caused by the Palestinian uprising.

Mohammed Amin Ibrahim was welcomed at Tel Aviv by officials from the Israeli foreign ministry and was to present his credentials on Monday together with a new Jordanian ambassador, the former ministry said.

Jordan and Egypt — the only two Arab states to have signed peace treaties with Israel — announced the return of their ambassadors after the Sharm el-Sheikh summit on Feb 8.

On the home front, Sharon stepped up efforts to have his 2005 budget through parliament by March 31 to save the government from collapse and shore up his plan to pull out of the Gaza Strip by the end of August.

The outcome of the vote, which is far from certain, has been touted as the last political chance for staunch opponents to scupper Sharon's plan to recall all Israeli soldiers and settlers from Gaza by the end of August.

Speaking to members of his right-wing Likud party Thursday, many of which are vehemently opposed to his pullout plan, Sharon said that voting against the budget could be unnecessary in toppling the government. AFP

PHOTO taken June 21, 2004 shows a victious mourning over the body of 1-year-old Ali, who died of malnutrition in a refugee camp in El Geneina in Darfur, Sudan. More than 180,000 people have been killed in the conflict in Sudan's Darfur region in the past 18 months, UN humanitarian affairs chief Jan Egeland said March 14. AP

UN Council urged to act on Darfur

GENEVA — A group of UN experts called Thursday the massive unrest by the UN Security Council to end the vital war in the western Sudanese region of Darfur, where it said ethnical cleansing, rape, torture, abductions and forced displacement are daily occurrences.

"Despite efforts by the international community to commit troops and assistance to the region, the violence continues virtually unabated ... and the threat of famine is looming," the experts said in a statement released on the sidelines of the UN Human Rights Commission meeting in Geneva.

They urged the Security Council to act immediately to adopt concrete measures to end the violence, which they said was occurring on "a widespread and systematic manner and continues on a daily basis."

More than 180,000 people have died in the Darfur region over the past 18 months while 1.8 million have been displaced, UN Undersecretary General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator Jan Egeland said Wednesday.

After Musa Abrous attack in Darfur rose up against Sudan's Arab-led government, Khartoum turned to proxy militias — the Janjaweed — to put down the rebellion, and those militias have been blamed for a scorched-earth campaign of murder, rape and pillage.

Peace talks between the government and the Darfur rebels were at a standstill.

The statement said, "Even with the deployment of African Union troops, in the past nine months the number of displaced people has continued to rise and attacks in civilians have persisted."

However, Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo on Thursday praised the work of the AU mission there. "I am reasonably satisfied with the African Union mission in Darfur," he said during a visit to Berlin. "I have been there and I must say wherever we have African Union forces peace and harmony have been maintained. We need that a little bit more."

The experts meeting in Geneva included the UN human rights expert in Sudan, Sima Samar Abbas Addo, the UN secretary general's special representative for displaced people, Walter Kalin, and the UN special rapporteur on the right to food, Jean Ziegler.

They also called for the Darfur case also to be referred to International Court of Justice.

The UN Security Council has passed resolutions ordering Sudan to rein in the Janjaweed and improve security in Darfur. Those have had little effect, however, and the top UN body is struggling to find ways to give new urgency to international efforts to help the Darfur population. AFP

Turkey landslide buries 17 people

ERMARA — Seventeen people were buried and seven others were injured Thursday when a landslide swept through a small village in Rize province in northeastern Turkey, officials said.

"Twenty-four houses and 17 people were buried in the landslide," Rize Gov Hasan Carpicioglu told the Anatolia news agency.

"We are facing a great disaster," he said. "Rescue efforts are being carried out in difficult conditions."

Dozens of rescuers and earth-moving machines were dispatched to the stricken area about 400 km northeast of Ankara, but small landslides continued, preventing the use of the machines, Carpicioglu said.

The rescuers, who would use only small instruments such as shovels, were expected to continue working throughout the night.

Seven people were hospitalized with injuries, a state desk in Ankara said.

"When I heard that big noise I thought our planes were passing over the village," the local mayor, Ismet Soydan, told Anatolia. "When I went out I saw the mountains coming down on us and I started running."

The province's deputy governor Ali Mumcu said that the landslide was caused by heavy rains smoothing the steep ground typical of the region.

The site was previously declared risky for settlement by local civil construction authorities, but residents refused to evacuate their homes, provided on a slope, Carpicioglu said.

The Red Crescent sent tents and humanitarian supplies to the village.

Another landslide occurred in Ulubey in the neighboring province of Ordu, but there were no reports of casualties, Anatolia said.

It struck a neighborhood that had been partially evacuated since 2000 due to the risk of landslides. AFP

SATURDAY, MARCH 19, 2005
PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER
SPORTS
Editor Teddyboy S. Melendrez

What's Inside

ACCUSATIONS FLY

Team confusion endangering Pacquiao bid

By Recah Trinidad

LAS VEGAS—An innocent pre-fight retina check yesterday exposed serious team trouble that has threatened to diminish Manny Pacquiao's chances against Erik Morales in their showdown.

Pacquiao refused the test despite requests by the test for fear it would blur his vision all the way to his big fight on Saturday (Sunday in Manila).

He refused led to the swapping of vicious charges between his old and new buddies.

Cornerman Jaci Mendoza accused that Pacquiao had refused to follow a directive from the Nevada State Athletic Commission because a strong liquid used in a previous process had "weakened him half-blind for three days."

The eye test, required of all boxers fighting in Nevada, should have been conducted two weeks, not three days before the fight, Mendoza said.

Somebody in Team Pacquiao goofed.

With the Pacquiao refusal, matters gripped **the promotion after it was announced that** the Filipino fighter would be barred from entering the ring on Saturday if he did not undergo the medical requirement.

Now came fears of a fight cancellation.

Roach blamed

Mendoza blamed trainer Freddie Roach whom he accused of failing to follow the medical requirements during training in Los Angeles.

"This is unforgivable, they should've met to (it happen)," Mendoza said.

Interviewed by the hysteric, Roach claimed Pacquiao had been properly checked but his papers were lost by the California clinic that did it.

The California check-up was supposedly done on March 4.

However, promoter Murad Muhammad and business manager Wad Nazario got riled after they learned that Roach had allegedly lied.

The two, members of the old set of Pacquiao backers, allegedly discovered that no medical check was done on Pacquiao in California. Others in the old group were Mendoza and Abby Lamco, technical adviser.

New group

With the eye check-up issue raging, the **suspicion blazed** proceeded to look at the new group that has taken over Pacquiao affairs, composed of manager Shelly Finkel, lawyer Keith Davidson, publicist Mitchell Camp and trainer Roach.

"We (Pacquiao) did not pay attention to his responsibilities and we did not know this (that we were told by the commission)," Muhammad said. "I feel bad because, every fight, we make sure that we address but the edge mentally, physically, medically."

Nazario, head of the original group that clashed Pacquiao to stardom, has not been seeing the boxer when he has trained like a son, although they both stay at the MGM Grand here.

"We don't know what's going on," Muhammad said. "What disturbs me is that we had bond, unity and love."

With the confusion threatening to escalate, Muhammad was quick to stress that it was neither his nor Nazario's fault.

"Hindi na kaganda-ganda (It's no longer like before)," said Mendoza of the original group.

He said he has stopped visiting Pacquiao in his room at the MGM Grand that has been dominated by a group of young hangers-on.

There used to be some procedure outside the old group.

Seen gambling

The spreading issue set up was first exposed when Pacquiao was seen gambling in the black jack section of the MGM casino after breakfast earlier in the week while a band of hangers-on cheered behind him.

This was the same gang that had endangered the boxer's health after it had allowed Pacquiao to be driven around by a member who was visibly going down with the flu for days on end.

Pacquiao's limbs were also put at great risk when the same driver delivered Manny at a drifting pace from Los Angeles to here.

The damage set-up inside Team Pacquiao was climaxed yesterday morning through the mobbish treatment given by Joseph Farmer, a new Pacquiao hanger-on, who turned many members of the Manila media when they requested for a small statement from the boxing star.

"No comment, no comment," said Farmer, who claimed Pacquiao was fast asleep, although **there were loud voices behind the** door when the media group knocked.

He seemed, peeping through a gap in the door, there's no way media could talk to the boss.

Meanwhile, it was learned that Pacquiao **did take the requested check-up after his final** gym afternoon workout yesterday.

Hayao Polo Acharon, who managed to talk later to Pacquiao, said the fighter was in

(Turn to A11)

Las Vegas roulette: Gorres now up against Fil-Am foe

By Sabrez L. Laguardiap, Correspondent

THE SUSPENSE regarding the identity of his opponent, last an hour, Filipino fighter 2 "The Onion" Gorres is unaware of a last-minute switch of the Manny Pacquiao-Erik Morales showdown.

A word of caution, though: he might still end up fighting another opponent tomorrow.

Less than a week after Gorres was matched against World Boxing Council mandatory challenger Jose Navarro of Colombia, the organizers came up with a curve ball for the former Philippine flyweight champion.

This time, Gorres is slated to face Filipino-American Glenn Donaire in an 8-round bout underneath the Pacquiao-Morales clash.

The talented Gorres of Cebu's AJA Stable, was first scheduled to battle Damian Onieri Kelso, who later backed out when talks bogged down over the financial aspect of the fight.

GORRES

Donaire reached the semifinals of the last US Olympic Boxing Trials in Florida.

WBO chief Phillip Lotsu Ndumbe, who is in Las Vegas to watch the Pacquiao-Morales showdown, confirmed that the Gorres-Donaire bout has been scheduled.

Gorres has an 18-1-1 win-draw-loss (18 KOs) record while Donaire is 13-1 (8 KOs).

Thai tormentor of Manny's brod KOs another Filipino

INTERNATIONAL Boxing Federation Super Flyweight boxer Pongsaklek Wonjongkam proved his win over Bobby Pacquiao was no fluke as he demolished another Filipino fighter, Dodjie Mahoy, in the fifth round yesterday of their scheduled 12-rounder in Bangkok, Thailand.

Wonjongkam's coach a mean right uppercut to break the nose of Mahoy, who saved himself from further damage and surrendered.

It was Wonjongkam's 26th win in 31 fights against 2 losses, with 20 knockouts. Last Feb. 15, Wonjongkam used a single punch to Bobby Pacquiao's (a Boxipo is to stop the Filipino in the ninth round in Pattaya, Thailand.

Sabrez L. Laguardiap

Fajardo retains billiards post

POC not yet ready to recognise new board

By Marc Anthony Reyes

EFREN Fajardo was given a fresh mandate as president of the troubled National Billiards and Snooker Congress of the Philippines yesterday.

The sides officially picked during the meeting held at the Philippine Columbian Association were Ben Mahabereza as chair, Rony Bagas as secretary-general, Joanna Fuchingco-Uy as treasurer, Julius Medes as auditor and Romeo "Boy" Trigueros as PRO.

Nelson and Mahabereza and Butch Pupit were elected as members of the new executive board on Feb. 20.

There are reports, however, that the Philippine Olympic Committee may not sanction the election because it had earlier called for a status quo to review the NBSC constitution and by-laws.

POC president Jose "Peping" Cojuangco added that since the groups of Fajardo and Quinto de Tagle, secretary general of the old board, are fighting for authority in the association, the contending parties will have to elevate the issue first to the POC arbitration committee.

Others named to the expanded NSBC board were Tony Buenaseda, Madon Hinagdian, Athenor Chua, Ernesto Chongco, Jonathan Ty and Mel Sarabia-supreme Efren "Bata" Reyes.

Aces finally break the ice

GAME TODAY
(Bataan People's Center, Balanga)
6:15 p.m.—Red Bull vs Purefoods

By June Navarro

COACH Tim Cone finally flashed a thin smile.

Cone's sudden change of aura came after Alaska scored a breakthrough win over Shell, 88-82, last night in the 2005 Gran Matador PBA Fiesta Conference at the Cuneta Astrodome.

Before the victory that snapped the Turbo Chargers' two-game roll, Cone and the Aces were becoming used to wearing long faces after starting the import-laced conference with three straight losses.

This time around, Jeffrey Cariaso and Brandon Cablay pulled the Aces from the brink of a fourth one by hitting key baskets at a time Shell was unloading a final charge.

Cablay's hit two three-pointers that broke Shell's momentum while Cariaso delivered the final blow with a huge jumper and a pair of charities to make it 84-80 for the Aces with just 30 seconds remaining.

Cariaso finished with 30 points after going 9-of-19 from the field and converting all of his 12 free throws while Brandon Cablay added 18 for the Aces, who got decent numbers from Leon Derricks for the first time.

Derricks had 15 points and 16 rebounds on a night Alaska had almost made up its mind of tapping a new import. Team sources bared the Aces already have a reinforcement in mind.

"I don't want to talk about it," said Cone.

In the second game, Barangay Ginebra pocketed victory No. 2 in three starts after nipping Coca-Cola, 86-83, in overtime.

The Tigers dropped to 1-3.

The Aces played almost out of rhythm but were lucky the Turbo Chargers were a pace slower throughout. The Aces overhauled a seven-point deficit in the second quarter and took a 59-50 lead at the end of the third primarily due to the Turbo Chargers' anemic performance.

ALASKA'S Bong Hawkins drives off Shell's Wesley Wilson during the game last night. RYAN LIM

The scores:

First Game:

ALASKA 88—Cariaso 30, Cablay 18, Derricks 15, Allado 9, Hugnatan 6, Hawkins 5, Padilla 3, Thoss 2, Wilson 0, Tejada 0.

SHELL 82—Wilson 35, Dela Cruz 12, Mamaril 10, Yap 10, Tubid 6, Alvarez 4, Calaguio 4, Jackson 1, Sotto 0, Cruz 0, Stamaria 0.

Quarters: 14-21, 31-32, 59-50, 88-82.

Second Game:

GINEBRA 86—Elisma 33, Caguioa 18, Salvacion 11, Santos 10, Dimaunahan 5, Seigle 4, Menk 3, Adducul 2, Echavez 0.

COCA-COLA 83—Arigo 27, Peek 20, Richards 10, Abarrientos 10, Singson 9, Julio 4, Reavis 3, Bacani 0, Antonio 0.

Quarters: 26-14, 41-34, 66-58, 73-73, 86-83.

Velo Challenge gets under way today at Amoranto

TRACK cycling comes alive beginning today at the newly refurbished Amoranto Velodrome in Quezon City with the staging of the First Philippine Velo Challenge.

Bemedalled SEAG veteran Paterno Curtan, the acknowledged spiritual leader of the national team, heads the Elite men's cast.

Co-presented by the First Gentleman's Foundation, Air21 and Tour Pilipinas of Lito Alvarez, the Velo Challenge is a 10-race day meet geared at reviving velodrome cycling and at preparing the national riders for the 23rd Southeast Asian Games in November.

Officials from the Philippine Sports Commission, the Philippine Olympic Committee and the sanctioning PhilCycling, headed by president and Customs Commissioner Ben Lina and chair Antonio Cruz, are expected at the 8:30 a.m. opening ceremonies.

There will also be races in the Women, Juniors (under-18), Executives, Masters and Veterans in the event also principally supported by the Philippine Amusement and Gaming Corp. and backed by Isuzu D-Max, Sharp Phils., San Miguel Corp., dzSR Sports Radio, Vitoria Tires, 93.9 ifm, RMN 558 and Inerasports.

The cyclists will race under teams MayniLA of Mayor Lito Atienza and Masco chair Ali Atienza, Tagaytay International Convention Center of Mayor Bambol Tolentino, Puerto Princesa of Mayor Edward Hagedorn, Quezon City of Mayor Sonny Belmonte, Wescor Transformer Corp. of Cruz and Elicir Bike Shop of mountain bike head Leo Magaway.

Quezon City, which has adopted the national cycling team at the Amoranto Sports Complex through Administrator Andy Apostol, is also supporting the Velo Challenge.

Team confusion serious ...

From page A25

lieved when a diluted eye solution, a lot lighter, was applied on his eye. Six centiliters of blood were also taken for HIV check purposes.

If it's any consolation, Nazario, whom Pacquiao continues to call Pop, chanced upon the famous fighter on the ground floor the other day.

Pacquiao rushed to Nazario and hugged his trusted former handler.

Pacquiao definitely wanted to have more of Nazario around him. But he no longer seemed in control, if not totally lost.

There's a strong likelihood Nazario and Pacquiao, inseparable before, would be reunited again in today's official weigh-in.

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OPINION

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There ought to be a law

THE FRUSTRATED swagger attempt of Abu Sayyaf leaders got a damper on the handover of command to the Philippine National Police. Reactions to recent policy recommendations made by Gen. Efren Abu have also resulted in the deferment of his confirmation as Armed Forces chief of staff by the Commission on Appointments. However, both recent appointments—of Abu as AFP chief of staff and of Arturo Lomibao as director general of the PNP—again highlight a lingering, institutional problem crying out for congressional resolution.

EDITORIALS

President Macapagal-Arroyo has been following a revolving-door policy on appointments to top police and military posts. To satisfy the cravings of officers to oval their careers at the top, appointments are made on a fleeting basis, which then requires them (in the eyes of the administration) to be seconded to civilian positions of authority after terminals. The result is, generals are made commanders of their services or their organizations for very brief periods and then placed in feeble trained positions in the Cabinet, with a corresponding requirement to keep moving retired officers up the civilian chain of authority.

It is reassuring that there is a lingering sense of professionalism and institutional vision among high-ranking officers. At least, to the extent that individuals such as Abu have made it clear that they would continue reforms began during their predecessors' tour of duty. The elimination of the graft-ridden Logistics Command is one such overdue example.

This, however, cannot hide the reality that keeping the continuation of such policies within the realm of discretion serves to keep organizations such as the military susceptible to a personalistic, instead of a professional, frame of mind.

There have been calls to fix the terms of top officers tasked with crucial responsibilities in the AFP. Originally, such calls were principally concerned with the need to give the superintendents of the Philippine Military Academy enough time to institute rational changes, and see them through. The revolving-door policy which makes political payback easy and real reform difficult, should finally be stopped.

Fixed terms will provide officers the opportunity to see only make changes but also to oversee them until they start to show results. It would also force the executive department to more seriously consider the repercussions of such appointments. More importantly, setting fixed terms for the top AFP and PNP officials would insulate these organizations from the most obvious forms of political deal-making and patronage, not to mention undue interference by the powers-that-be.

Incendiary

THE ARMED Forces of the Philippines has not been giving its opinion on religious matters, including whether or not victims of shootouts deserve hope in heaven.

"They are not true Muslims. They are not true believers," Lt. Col. Buenaventura Pascual, military spokesperson, has said, referring to the 24 prison inmates killed earlier this week in the Camp Bagong Diwa uprising. "That's why Allah sent them to hell." Other military officials have expressed alarm that ordinary Muslims regard the dead men as martyrs. "This is the distorted interpretation (of the Koran that is taught) by the Tablighi" (a group of ultra-preachers in the Middle East who are suspected of teaching radical Islam), added Pascual.

But nothing qualifies Pascual or his commanders to comment on such things. Questions of faith are best left to the competent authorities of a faith. Secular military authorities, most of them Christians, should be the last to pontificate on matters they aren't competent to address. There is a pressing need for non-Muslims to attempt to understand the complexities and nuances of the Islamic religion, and an equally urgent need for Muslims to enlighten non-Muslims as to the proper understanding of the tenets of their faith.

Gratuitous comments such as the ones made by Pascual are incendiary and irresponsible, coming at a time when troopers are again on the rise. Such statements only serve to stoke further the resentment of Muslim Filipinos.

Confirmation of appointments

SEPARATE OPINION

Joaquin L. Cruz

I FULLY support Gen. Aquilino Pimentel's position that the President-Macapagal-Arroyo should not reappoint Commissioner Virgilio Garcillano to the Commission on Elections after his nomination to that body was by passed by the Commission on Appointments for the same week.

This action, according to Pimentel, was "an unmistakable signal that the CA members consider Garcillano's participation in the controversial post-freedom of his assured moral background and his supposed involvement in electoral fraud."

"If the President is serious about removing officials who are a disgrace to the public service," the opposition senator said, "she should start by not appointing Garcillano."

There are three things the Commission on Appointments may do when the President of the Philippines submits to it a nomination for a public office while Congress is in session or as an ad interim appointment to the said office issued during the legislative recess.

As a matter of practice, however, the appointments body usually confines its choice to the members of the Cabinet, as his official family, without much delay or objection. There are occasions, however, when approval is withheld owing to questions about the subject's qualifications that require more careful examination. An example is the case of Secretary Angelo Reyes whose confirmation is still hanging fire because of concerns about his record and integrity.

If the Commission is unable to grant its imprimatur to the President's recommendation, it may to reject him-some-related reasons (and disqualifications) and so give his nominee or ad interim appointee a brand test, simply by passing him until Congress adjourns and with it the Commission, too. Its passing is a useful and charitable way of telling the nominee that he is unacceptable but without saying baldly that he has been rejected.

The third method is seldom employed except in extreme cases where the subject is so utterly unfit for the office to which he has been named that there is no alternative but to reject him outright. If the commission some members who were subjected to such disgraceful treatment, they will nevertheless remain anonymous in this article.

A person carefully by passed only has actual, or blackballed by the Commission should be decent enough to accept his fate and not expect, much less work for, his reappointment by an accommodating President. The President himself should respect the verdict of the Commission on Appointments instead of dishonoring it by insisting on his disapproved choice.

It is another matter where the candidate is by passed because the Commission did not have enough opportunity to consider his record, as in the case of insufficient information about him or more pressing business before it. Reappointment of the by-passed appointee would be justified in such circumstances. But reappointment of a by passed nominee found unacceptable on the merits would be unwelcome to the Commission as a sign of the President's intransigence or his disrespect for the body.

The facility with which the President's recommendations to the Commission on Appointments are approved is an indication of her influence over its members. Such members are appointees from among the several parties in the membership of Congress as mandated by the Constitution. The body is controlled by the dominant parties in the two chambers, which are essentially headed by the President of the Philippines, and is chaired by the Senate President, who is usually allied with the administration.

It may be recalled, though, that during the presidential election campaign of 1946, Pres. Elpidio Quirino by did not have the courtesy to attend the confirmation of his appointments from the Commission on Appointments then chaired by his rival, Senator President Manuel A. Roxas. In 1949, President Elpidio Quirino's nominees did was opposed by former Senate President Jose Avelino, who was none too kindly ridded in conjunction with his former party mates.

President Arroyo should have no trouble with Senate President Franklin Drilon as then belonging the same majority, whatever they call it. There are, however, a number of independent-minded senators like Senator Pimentel, Senator Juan Ponce Enrile and Senator Panfilo Lacson who have been wasting no time in the selection of its members. And well should be for if that distinguishable body is to regain its once respected name.

I do not know Commissioner Garcillano personally and have little information about his past except that he was once (secret) PMAer. I do recall in that he and another classmate personnel were appointed to the Comelec by President Ramos on the day following his adjournment of Congress in February last year, obviously to enable them to assume office immediately.

What happened to their ad interim appointments upon the resumption of the congressional session last June? They were probably not confirmed before its adjournment, which is why Garcillano's apparently new appointment is again being challenged by Senator Pimentel...this time successfully, I hope.

Questionable revenue estimates

GET REAL

Solita Collas-Monsod

PEDRO DE Secretary Cesar Purisima is very anxious for the Senate to pass the VAT measure, adding that every day of delay costs the country some P165 million in lost revenues (P60 billion projected annual yield, divided by 365 days).

This was understood to mean they did, according to his boss, the government needs at least P60 billion yearly in additional revenues (or run owning measures) if the country is to get out of its fiscal bind which has already led to alarming increases in the share of amortization, health and education budgets to service servicing the debt never before. So far, the only progress in that goal comes from the 40 percent increase in congressional pork barrel (savings of around P6.3 billion) in the 2005 budget, and the passage of the sin tax and the lateral auction laws which are projected to yield P75 billion and P20 billion, respectively, respectively. With the VAT measure and its supposed P60 billion yield a year, we can practically go into the sea.

Purisima is going to be hit by a double whammy. First, he is going to realize that his bond estimate of P60 billion additional revenues is too low. The CPP-21 Papers, and later national income statistics, estimate that the additional amount needed to stave off a financial collapse and to ensure long-run development (by, among others, increasing spending on education, health, and infrastructure) would be about 2.9 percent of GDP, or P300 billion to P400 billion a share or P600 billion to P800 billion.

That is not all. Purisima is also going to realize that the estimates made by Congress of the projected additional revenues from the sin measures are too high. Take the lateral auction bill. It is now a tax measure per se. In effect, it gives the heads of the revenue-collecting agencies the authority to knock any selective officer who fails to achieve a collection targets, and replace him/her with someone else who can potentially deliver the goods.

The P16 billion in additional revenue attributed to this measure came out of thin air, figuratively speaking. Neither the Department of Finance nor the Bureau of Internal Revenue was prepared (or was asked) to make an estimate of its impact. It was the President who came out with the figure, and she has not explained how it was derived. But given that the Bill and Customs collections have been plenty (made up many) new and, the probability that P16 billion is an overestimate is pretty high.

Let's look at the estimates of increased revenues from the sin tax bill (which covers cigarettes, beer and "distilled spirits") estimated at P75 billion a year. It must look modest to Purisima, but the estimates were derived. For 2005, for example, Congress estimates the additional tax take from cigarettes to be P5.3 billion, but this assumes that cigarette factories will have increased by to some 20 percent between 2003 and 2004, an assumption that has no basis from past trends. But, even if you take that, and then add the estimated additional revenue from beer (P2.19 billion) and from the as-yet-not-well (P3.1 billion), estimates taken at face value for no other reason than that I don't know enough about this aspect, the total will only be P10.5 billion, a far cry from P16 billion. The only figure there to P16 billion I see from the computations provided to me is the amount of P15.78 billion estimated additional revenues from cigarette taxes in the year 2011, when all the higher taxes will finally kick in. And just for purposes of comparison, in the case of cigarettes, no estimates made by the Public Finance Centers of the Philippines (PFCP) shows that the incremental revenue from cigarette taxes in 2005 will be only P3.5 billion.

Finally, let's go to the much-vaunted former HB 3/E, also known as the Reno GEL, a bill apparently so hastily prepared that there are many provisos, and the entire section, injection vendor e.g., the crimes and might club sector, penalty clauses, and the provisions of taxes of 18 percent, was brought under VAT coverage, and now will pay less than half of what is used to pay the banking sector, which was paying a 3 percent gross receipts tax. In fact of VAT was brought under VAT coverage, but the 3 percent GRT was (not repealed), so banks will now have to pay 10.93 percent tax (less than the corporate income tax is 35 percent for the next three years. Moreover, if the three bill really intended the 18 percent VAT on banks to replace the 3 percent GRT, the repeal of the GRT would reduce the government's tax take by an other P15 billion, thereby reducing the net revenue increase to only P5.3 billion. A far cry from P60.3 billion.

And the tragedy of it is that the ultimate-income of all these questionable revenues are the Filipino people.

Justice for PNB victims

POLITICAL TIDBITS

Belinda Olivares-Cunanan

LAST Thursday, I began the only sad story about how depositors of the Philippine National Bank were [illegible] after 25 years to say there are 40,000 defrauded of their hard-earned lifetime savings through a clever scheme pulled by former PNB fiscal branch manager Teresita B. Gregorio and accounter service officer Gloria Miranda. The parents seemed to be the cases of the 40,000, and it's possible that the elaborate scam is going on not only in the PNB but also in other banks. But the tragedy is that the PNB customers are play-dead and denied to the depositors' phone to get back their money, even after firing the bank officers who defrauded them.

* * *

The two-bank officers were able to convince 22 depositors to transfer their local and foreign currency deposits into new high-yield investments with a stated maturity of one year. Every one month or five, they received the interest payments regularly from the two bank officers or from tellers. It was only later, when the payments stopped coming, that they learned that their money had been illegally withdrawn making part of a "loan" against their own deposits, which Gregorio and Miranda then lent to an "accommodator" borrower. In most cases, this borrower was a business PNB client who could not have problems loans from the bank itself since he had a bad record. Where he wouldn't pay the depositors' funds were seized by the bank to pay for the interest charges of their own "loans."

* * *

Retired advertising exec Lipay Nuñez de Jesus had her entire retirement money amounting to several millions of pesos and her daughter's dollar funds with the PNB. Then she was shocked when she stopped by the bank to find the deposits were applied to bank charges for "rental" the bank after her "loan" defaulted on payments. Perusing the bank documents later, Lipay says she realizes were mostly fraudulent, and her signatures, especially on the signature cards, were forged "with such reckless abandon that a handwriting expert wouldn't be involved to repudiate them."

* * *

The victims were recently cooperative—if rather naive—senior citizens who gambled their retirement funds (nobody's fool when invested in euro notes). But genuinely because they are conservative, it's unthinkable that they would gamble their lifetime savings to raise out a loan against their own savings to [illegible] to lend to "accommodators" borrowers.

* * *

Take Virginia Pollard, who first exposed the fraud pulled by Gregorio and Miranda to the PNB head office, which led to their investigation and dismissal. Pollard, a housewife, had built up sizable dollar as well as peso accounts. In 2000, the two officials enticed her to entrust her money to them, promising a minimum earning of 5 percent per month. Pollard was also to partially recover her dollar deposit, but her peso deposit has not been recovered nearly five years later.

* * *

Dr. Antonio Mota was a doctor in the Baguio Regional Provincial Hospital until he retired, while his wife Elvira was a pharmacist who gave up her profession to take care of their family in their daughter Elvira Mota Rodrigues, who owns flight [illegible] business. The two were also well-to-do [illegible] but they did not want to have any "usury." Like many other folks, they believed in spending wisely and keeping money in the bank for a rainy day. They chose the PNB because they thought it was a good bank. In May 2000, Gregorio and Miranda convinced Mrs. Mota that her time deposit would earn a "special rate" because of the VIP status with the bank. But when someone from the bank called her up to remind her of her "loan," she was shocked and she began to worry about it.

* * *

With daughter Elvira, Mrs. Mota met with new bank managers, Luz Bolagaita, who showed them the bank's copy of her "loan" documents. Mota insisted she ever got a loan, and Bolagaita told her to clear it up with Gregorio and Miranda. When confronted, she was told that the "loan" was the word "loan" at all, but explained that "to short, meaning we only pay you." Later they returned the dollar funds to the Motas, but the combined peso accounts of many millions was never returned.

The common denominator in the stories of her family's funds caused them to fall ill. In June 2003 she died, vanishing in the end that she did and leave any loan from the PNB. Dr. Mota followed her to the grave soon after. Elvira, in a meeting with PNB officer vice president Rosendo Gonda, was told that the time deposits of her parents are secured by a hold-out in favor of PNB. "How can I find justice for my parents who thought their money was in a placement similar to a time deposit, and instead they got a loan and I find justice for their seriously dead?" she asks.

* * *

The case of Francis and Stellaria Reyes is just a pathetic. Former model and beauty queen Stellaria for nearly 25 years as the executive handling the many loans and debates, in that he came home with his hearing somewhat impaired. Herbert is a public school teacher and they have several children, the youngest only 12 years old. The Reyes deposited P1 million in PNB for [illegible] they would use their children through school. In December 2000, however, Gregorio and Miranda convinced Mrs. Reyes that her time deposit would earn a "special rate" because of her VIP status with the bank. But when someone from the bank called her up to remind her of her "loan," she was shocked and she began to worry about it.

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(Monday: The view from the Hill)

We have not seen the end of terror

SOME time back, TV news showed footage of a rally-test some university in Mindanao by students protesting the appointment of a new president. While the students barricaded the gates of the campus, voices could be heard in the background repeatedly chanting, "Hindu Abbo! Hindi a gusto!"

What I found most ironic was not only that these students would lend a religious color to an otherwise secular issue, but that I had heard the same battle cheer of "Hindu Abbo!" not too long ago on another TV news footage showing an angry crowd of Iraqis as they surrounded a burning vehicle and reportedly stomped on the charred bodies of four American civilian security contractors.

While the circumstances in the two instances were totally different, the common denominator of anger and violence makes for a volatile mix. Some analysts speak of a global Islamic resistance after 9/11, and the Philippines has not been spared from the resurgence, with the Superferry 14 bombing, the Valentine's Day bombings and the recent Camp Bagong Diwa bombing. The Iraq war has become a recruiting an Ground Zero, at least in Southeast Asia, of this global Islamic revolution, and the answer government realizes this, the better for all of us.

What should concern us now is the possibility that the armed conflict in Mindanao that has consumed almost the 1970's may have engendered a new generation of Islamic radicals who identify with the terrorist methods of the Abu Sayyaf, and by extension, the international terrorist network of al-Qaeda headed by Osama bin Laden, and who would like to see the entire country of predominant Islamic rule in the country in the future.

If there's anything that the Iraqui saga may be telling us, it is that the problem of terrorism is bound to get worse, not better. Because may be one battle where the Abu Sayyaf had a few of its members, but it could be a pyrrhic victory for the government, because the war against terrorism is by itself.

COMMENTARY

Ernesto M. Hilario

The war for the hearts and minds of the Muslims in Mindanao and elsewhere in the country rages, not in the battlefield, but in the communities where they live, often under conditions of extreme poverty. The government [illegible] Muslim Mindanao, if I'm not mistaken, is considered the poorest of the poor areas in the entire country because it has few schools, roads and other infrastructure, and scarce livelihood opportunities. Add to it more than 30 years of [illegible] armed rebellion, it may also be equally true that the long-festering secessionist movement has exacerbated the problem of poverty simply because no development can take place where armed conflict is present almost daily.

It is said that this looks of victimhood is to poverty and injustice. Whenever I hear someone from government say that, I instinctively squirm and cringe, because it means that the problem of terrorism will be with us for a very long time since poverty and injustice are problems will be with us for a very long time. It is far better for government to say that it will send all terrorists to jail or make them meet their Creator posthaste, and mean it.

I am not saying that the government should abandon or postpone all plans to pursue the socio-economic development of Muslim Mindanao. In fact, it should accelerate the delivery of basic social services to areas cut off from access, such as [illegible] and Sulu, as a key ingredient of a comprehensive program to address the problem of terrorism.

But beyond this, there is a need to carry a big stick and flush out the remnants of the Abu Sayyaf from their lairs.

Again, this is easier said than done. However, the military and the police have enough wariness to track down the Abu Sayyaf and to bring them to the bar of justice through good intelligence and relentless pursuit operations.

They can also pursue further terrorist acts through "target hardening," that is, securing possible targets so as to make them virtually impregnable.

It is in the political aspect of counter-terrorism, however, where much more can be done. The government should use other political weapons in the arsenal to isolate terror. It can do so by organizing a broad political movement within the local Muslim community that emphasizes peace and tolerance of other religious beliefs. This movement could spearhead a massive demonstration by Filipino Muslims all over the country to denounce the Abu Sayyaf as criminals, whether of the kidnap or al-Qaida variety. This could be part of a whole process of draining the pond that breeds terrorists.

Still another track is to accelerate the peace process with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front. If, by chance, the MILF cannot control the members of MILF suppose for the Abu Sayyaf, they are united by the same religious beliefs, and they pursue the same political agenda of self-rule. In other words, an MILF-Abu Sayyaf mutual alliance, while anathema to many in the MILF, cannot be completely ruled out. It could possibly be a marriage between the government and the MILF would serve to further drain the terrorist pond.

In the meantime, the police and the military should be ready to thwart any retaliatory attack by the Abu Sayyaf or by any part of the latter's devastation in the battle of Basilan. The government may have scored previous points that time, but the authorities should keep in mind that the Abu Sayyaf, like all savage creatures, relies on the element of surprise, and strikes when we least expect it.

Ernesto Hilario is a freelance journalist.

A couple of laughs

SENSE AND SENSIBILITY

Randy I. Harper

"I. The greatest miracle in the bible is when Joshua told his soldiers to stand still and he disappeared.

"II. I once was a Hebrew King who was skilled at playing the lute. He fought the Philistines, a race of people who lived in biblical times.

"III. Solomon had 40 Danish sons, had 300 wives and 700 porcupines.

"IV. When Mary heard she was the mother of Jesus, she sang the Magna Carta.

"V. When the three wise guys from the east side arrived, they presented Jesus with myrrh.

"VI. Jesus was born because Mary had an immaculate conception.

"VII. St. John the Backstreet dumped water on his head.

"VIII. Jesus spoke mostly in Golden Rule, which is to do unto others before they do one to you. He also explained, a man shall not live by swiss alone.

"IX. It was a miracle when Jesus rose from the dead and it managed to get the tombstone off the entrance.

"X. The people who followed the lord were called the 12 disciples.

"XI. The rapture is when the wives of the apostles were taken up to heaven.

"XII. One of the opposition was St. Matthew who was always jealous.

" A. St. Paul converted to Christianity, he preached holy matrimony, which is another name for marriage.

"B. Christians have only one spouse. This is called monotony.

"The next e-mail was sent by a friend in Iraq, who obviously agrees that mothers never change.

Columbus' mother: I don't care what you've discovered, you still could have written!

Columbus' mother: Can't you paint on walls like other children? Or you have any idea how hard it is to get that stuff off the ceiling?

Napoleon's mother: All right, if you won't eat up your supper and stride your ladies, take your handicap of three and three cubits.

Abraham Lincoln's mother: Again with the stovepipe hat? Can't you just wear a baseball cap like the others kids?

Thomas Jefferson's mother: Of course, I'm proud that you invented the electric light bulb. Now turn it off and get to bed!

Albert Einstein's mother: But it's your senior picture. Can't you do something about your hair?

A bit of a update on what Microsoft is going to identify with the following phrase [illegible]. It's time to know "bitch tips engine."

Helpdesk: What kind of computer do you have?

Female [sic] customer: A white one.

* * *

Helpdesk: Click on the "My computer" icon on the left of the screen.

Customer: Now, what's an icon?

Customer: Hi, this is Gillian. I can't get my dishes out.

Helpdesk: Have you tried pushing the button?

Customer: Yes, quite a few times.

Helpdesk: That doesn't sound good. I'll make a note.

Customer: No ... wait a minute.... Oh, here it is! It's still on my desk ... I haven't removed it yet.... sorry.

* * *

Helpdesk: Good day, how may I help you?

Male [sic] customer: Hello... I can't print.

Helpdesk: Would you click on start for me, sir.

Customer: Listen pal, don't start getting technical on me! I'm not Bill Gates, damn it!

[And now enjoy your weekend. And Happy Easter!]

* * *

Comments to hendelhayper@yahoo.com

Cool pandas

EVERY year since I entered college, I write a diary entry or essay to commemorate the passing of another year in my life. This year, I'm writing two days after my 21st birthday. It's not my way of planning over the last time I have put my childhood behind—but, yeah, it is something like that. I have just been a little too busy to try to put some order into my life.

You see, I'm a new graduate—actually, as almost [illegible] have a dream that I've been putting off writing and papers I have yet to talk to. Anyway, for the past month I've been training in a call center company. In many job, or so I thought. But first, you have to get used to the working hours (the shift starts at 9 p.m. and ends at 6 a.m.). Then you have to get used to the people you talk to over the phone (some can be really nice and some can be really, well...some really ought to be censored). And then you have to fight off boredom (doing the same thing over and over again does not a great job make).

But the reason I stayed has nothing to do with the job, and everything to do with the people I work with. Most [illegible] are quite college-age, after the first few days we seem together, are already know who were virgins and when the others lost their innocence (so to speak)—who had piercings on various parts of the body, not counting the ears, and who watched porn regularly. We took cigarette breaks together, and are "lunch" to the cafeteria at two in the morning and dumped several sachets of instant coffee to survive the shift. After nine hours, we reconvened "off" in our respective homes or in, say, trying variety to make offers of boredom for the next week and I'm hoping from the old stones. Seriously winced whenever a burst of creative exhortion would turn the air like as one of us simply couldn't contain his or her emotions.

At the end of the day (which reminded with the start for people keeping normal hours), bad calls, handling the flow, QA (quality analysis), and accidentally speaking in some garbled Bekal with English interrupting interjections. All we wanted to do was drop on our beds and return to (or supposedly normal lives—only to rise up again at night left to begin our part of the race.

I'll miss those guys. The "eleven-nine" (did I get the numbers right?), our Bona kids, my patient TL, "Zilla," "Josh," "Sinead," "Two-Ming Ta," the insomniac and, of course, my chain-smoke buddies. They were the main reason I stayed until three days for the entire season I had it hard to leave. I may not have gotten some rich materials for my annual gripes about nursing a post-oldie, but I did meet the coolest pandas I'll ever encounter and that was a wonderful, great, "refreshing" thing indeed.

Smelling street signs

WHEN I was job-hunting, I had enough experiences to write an essay about getting lost. Back then, it used to be such an adventure for me—getting lost. It was as if I was exploring uncharted territory. I wasn't irritated easily. I thought it fun my every time I went around a block without finding the tallest building there. I was even secretly proud of the fact that while some people had a keen sense of direction, I had none at all.

Maybe it's part of this annoying thing called growing up, but I don't get lost anymore. Maybe I've got lost. Especially not in a place where I've stayed for the better part of five years. I get irritated at the slightest delay and I have become pragmatic about being late, just telling myself if they forgive me, great; if they was not, it's not meant to be.

I didn't even notice that change of attitude until I came across my unfinished and unedited essay about the art of getting lost. I read it out of sudden curiosity. Don't worry, I'm not one for growing up. I don't want to be the kind of adult kids shun. I don't want to be surly and boring and ... so monosyllabic adult.

After reading that article, I wanted to be lost again. I wanted to be the person who thought that getting lost was an art. Because that person had a sense of humor. That person had fun. That person had a life.

I know that I cannot stave off growing older. It's inevitable. It's the passing of time that I'm having some trouble with. I know that it entails taking responsibility. Actually, that's all. I can remember about growing up. I'm sure there are others, but I know it doesn't mean losing one's sense of humor or being a killjoy the whole year round.

Now, if only I can discover the art of getting in a place on time....

Sheryl Paulina M. Pitman, 22, is a sales and service consultant in a call center and part-time student at the University of the Philippines Diliman. This was written two years ago when she was trying to decide whether to stay or leave. She has since decided for them.

NOTICE TO YOUNGBLOOD CONTRIBUTORS:

If you are sending your contributions by e-mail, please address to youngblood@inquirer.com.ph together with your address and information about your age and the school, course and year you're enrolled in or if employed, the position you're holding and the company you work with.

YOUNG BLOOD

Maria Kristina M. Tirtacio

THEY SAID

Idle talk

"Silence is not a disease but no one is solving it. We are not focused. We keep on talking about the problem but we don't do anything about them."

—Sen. Richard Gordon on the proposal to use messages with proceeds going to agriculture or education fund

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House Bill 3773's basic flaw

LETTERS

I FULLY agree with the statement March 6 editorial on House Bill 3773 which seeks to regulate issues involving reproductive health and population management.

As a man of the cloth, I will speak about this matter from my moral or ethical viewpoints. The Church only wants to promote the well-being, fulfillment and happiness of each person. So does the State. The Church helps the person attain his good by giving him the means to learn his conscience so that he can act rationally—like she does by her preaching and services. The State helps attain the good of the person by enacting laws that can order its society and by enforcing these laws.

Now, state laws can truly attain the good of the person if these laws conform to the natural moral law, which commands person and state, because this is the law inscribed by the Creator in the human person. In his mind and heart, the rational person who uses his reason upright will recognize this law in himself.

What the Church is trying to say is that House Bill 3773 will not attain the good of the person because there is a presumption there that does not conform to the natural moral law: this is the presumption of the use of contraceptives in order to prevent unwanted pregnancies. The Church has always taught that using artificial contraceptives to prevent pregnancy is against the natural moral law.

Many people argue that such a position is burdensome because there is no difference, as far as results are concerned, between couples using artificial contraceptives and couples who practice natural methods (periodic continence). Such result in no conception. So, why is the former case immoral and the latter not?

I have asked married couples this question: what difference do you see if you use artificial contraceptives and if you practice natural methods? They always answer the same thing: natural methods require self-control, continence. So that's the difference and that's the point. Using artificial contraceptives does not promote chastity, the virtue that is the antithesis of the vice of lust and weakness in the human will to control the sexual urge. The good of the person demands that he is able to make reason prevail over impulse. A person can become a slave to his drives by allowing himself to be carried away by them. He or she does not control self; instead, from its members if they practice chastity but one see that it is the lack of chastity that is at the root of marital infidelities, broken families, broken lives, crimes and many other disorders in society.

So, House Bill 3773 has good aims in prevention abortions because of unwanted pregnancies, but the means to achieve that end must be morally sound; promoting the use of artificial contraceptives is not a sound way.

—FR. EUSEBIO L. MACHINO,
chaplain, Benedictine School,
Alabang, Muntinlupa City

'Sad' argument

Forth refers to the published full-page statement of my colleagues, Atty. Chuck Mendiola, which appeared in the March issue of the magazine. Last last year, August-Ding and I met for the first time. We have not talked since. I am introduced in the Intermediate School case. Since Chuck has gone public, I would like to be heard on my own.

The arguments that one should not complain because he is lawyer off whose he is that he would be otherwise is unjustified. Long ago, that classic argument was used for oppression, when Filipinos wanted to have jobs in the US military—factory than dusting sheet for the top brass. We now have even self-loosely-gainfully in the US Army because. Like others versus minorities, it was resolved that—like what Frederick Douglass said of the struggle of the blacks—you cannot have the status without the road of so many waters. The idea that Bagtas cannot ask for short becomes bad public-school teachers go low pay to lead. It can be used by predatory mining companies that are now coming in—that local staff should not complain because they would otherwise be jealous or worse the very poor pay, in a country with so great and dignity and with low standards and expectations.

In short, we struggle with serious policy questions here. If Chuck, for whom I have great respect and kindness as a reasonable doctor, caring person, had never left us and stayed with us all his time, he might see it from our perspective and appreciate our effort to come [illegible] why ours [illegible] "sound better" with the system. Or maybe he'll heed, who has supposedly convinced us now the system is at fire were in some bad phenomena. I am reminded of the well-back Deep Throat, and Kenneth military based defense which found out made [illegible] who's better just make good way to make a difference. Maybe the other lawyers are involved. But, now that the none of lawyers has come out, we should look at the record of such and every lawyer who has been involved in this case, [illegible] Supreme Court. If any justice has been appointed, he should speak out.

—ESP SADURAS,
4032 Sipanan, St., Pelaran, Makati City

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Life-and-death matter also for the investors

MAY I update your readers on the mining issues raised in Fr. John J. Carr[illegible]'s column, "Clinching or golden arrows," (PDI, 3/3/05)? I absolutely agree with him that resolving the remaining Placer Dome/Marcopper problems in Marinduque presents an opportunity for the Arroyo administration to demonstrate political will if it is to convince more Filipinos of its readiness to face the consequences of its more aggressive mining policy.

However, while the Supreme Court declared the [illegible] foreign-owned corporations to manage and control mining operations under the Technical Assistance Agreement (TVAA), it is now important to temper this restrictive strategy with legislation to preserve the environment, ecology and health of potential mining communities. That will [illegible] to [illegible] the kind of hardball [illegible] Placer Dome/Canada [illegible] dust-choking emissions, leaking from the abandoned mine pits in those communities. Learning from the painful lessons of the Marinduque tragedy, I filed three bills to address the most critical concerns on health and environment, compensation for damages and mounting liability.

If these bills become law, I believe our government will be in a stronger position to deal with hard-ball playing corporations. The message we should send to potential investors is that there remains room for giants who merely want to tap the riches of Philippine flesh into an open pit in the mining areas. Even if it is a matter of life and death for the people who live in these areas, it should be the same for the investors as well.

Striking a balance between preserving our environment, providing our people with employment, promoting our people and encouraging development is never an easy task. In life, there are always different options for people to choose from. But the issue we are in is no easier now than Filipinos will not be left carrying the empty bag. There will never be any perfect system for mining and anything out natural resources.

The best that we can hope for is that we have a set of rules and regulations that will make sure investors feel safe they are in the same boat as the natural [illegible] Instead of just having Filipinos clutching at golden straws, the economic investors have to trade at realistic standards as if their every "lives" depended on the continued well-being of both the environment and health of the community.

—SEN EDDIE VILLANUEVA G. SEVES,
Lone District of Barlesbagan,
House of Representatives, Quezon City

The real terrorists

THE PROPOSAL of the Armed Forces of the Philippines, articulated by Lt. Gen. Gilberto Teodoro, to criminalize the term "human rights violations" (or, practically, investigations, reports, prosecutions and organizations by those whom the military feels remotely related to as "known terrorists"), under an "anti-terror, anti-law" is plain crass.

Such a suggestion reveals the mechanical thinking of the military establishment. No wonder how the AFP could have conjured such a proposal.

The proposal is in itself fraught with errors. It assumes a chilling effect on journalistic rules, in their daily pursuit of the truth, sometimes up-to-the-bone integrity, objectivity and fair play by soliciting the views of all parties concerned as much as humanly possible. It is bad enough that through these possibilities of malicious and imaginative, arrest reports already have the [illegible] and the military. Does the AFP and Malacañang intend to monopolize opinion and rob our news [illegible] of [illegible] only opinion [illegible] propaganda arm?

Perhaps it would be best for Teodoro and his fellow [illegible] to [illegible] their homes of espionage and corrupt officials who sell the guns and bombs that are now killing our servicemen in the field. Those misfits are the real terrorists.

—EDMUNDO BACSAL,
111 Innerbailey St., Kamuning, Quezon City

If you have any complaints, grievances or suggestions about the newspaper or any of its people in the hopefuls, you may write to the Readers' Advocate, Philippine Daily Inquirer, Chino Roces Avenue, corner Tapia and Blumentritt Streets, City of Makati or send a fax to him (897-8710), (897-8711) or e-mail to inquirer@inquirer.com.ph.

Writers of letters to the editor are required to include their complete address, and telephone or mobile number or e-mail address for verification purposes. The inquirer will not publish any letter unless such information is supplied.

Across the NATION
Assistant Editor Tony Bergonia

Atis losing land to solon, board member

By Nestor P. Burgos Jr.
PDI Visayas Bureau

ILOILO CITY—The Ati families on Boracay Island, believed to be the original inhabitants of the island, fear eviction after caretakers of the land they occupy erected barbed wire fences that have divided the community.

In Western Union, of the Holy Rosary Parish Ati Mission (HRAMI), said in a telephone interview that caretakers of the property owned by the family of Antonio Tiu, brother of provincial board member Jose Tiu, put up the fence early this week.

She said construction of the barbed wire fence, erected on all parts of the property owned by the family of Allan Tiu, Hortensio Miraflores, was ongoing as of yesterday. The construction was being supervised by the property caretaker, Raymundo Escopalo.

Union said the fencing has separated 15 houses of Ati families and the house that she was occupy in the Miraflores property is a long standing request from his family for the HRAMI and the Ati to vacate their property.

He clarified that he is only a "silent owner" of the property. He, however, refused to further discuss the issue, saying that because he is a government official, his statements "have heavy implications."He did not elaborate.

Francisco said the fences have restricted the movements of the Ati in the community.

The Ati community occupies a one-hectare area in Sitio Balabag in Barangay Balabag, one of three villages of Boracay, at the opposite side of the white beach.

There are at least 10 families and around 15 Ati now living in Balabag. The homes of around 10 families and the HRAMI house are on the lot owned by the Miraflores family while the rest of the families occupy part of the land owned by the Tius.

The Tiu and Miraflores families have claimed ownership of the land but the Ati claim that they are the original inhabitants of the island.

The claim has been supported by documentation conducted by the team of the HRAMI and government agencies.

There is a pending application for a Certificate of Ancestral Domain Title (CADT) filed on Feb. 23, 2000 before the NCIP to prevent their ejectment from the land.

NCIP chair Reuben Dasay Lingahay wrote a letter to Representative Miraflores on Feb. 16, urging him to respect the rights of the indigenous group and not evict the Ati.

But Union said Lingahay, the caretaker of the Miraflores property, told the Ati that they were putting up the fence because they "encroached" on land.

"It's clear that their intention is to pressure the Ati to leave," she said.

"Please help us, the Ati have nowhere to go if they are driven out," Union appealed.

FIESTA GUARD
A soldier keeps a watchful eye on crowd performers during the holding of the 38th Ati-Atihan sa Dalanas on March 16 amid terrorist threats.

PTA gives city supervision of Hundred Islands

AGAMBOK CITY—After 66 years under the supervision of the Philippine Tourism Authority, the Hundred Islands National Park have until now been managed by the city government.

Mayor Herman Bulguerin on Friday signed a memorandum of agreement with PTA general manager Ildefon Jesus Barbers and first assistant Secretary Michael Johnson transferring the management of the 1,844-hectare national park to the city government.

Bulguerin said the transfer will give Alaminos residents an opportunity to harness the tourism and economic potential of the national park, considered as the jewel of Pangasinan tourism.

He said the transfer would promote a "sense of ownership" among residents who have been "alienated" for so long from the Hundred Islands.

Opportunities

The city government is banking on the business and employment opportunities from the development of the cluster of islands.

Debonair has promised to allocate P5 million from his agency to help the city government start with the development of the national park.

Debonair said the national park is among the 10 eco-tourism spots in the country that the government is promoting. He said the transfer of management of the national park is also part of the government efforts to decentralize other tourism spots in the country.

"Ingat na lang ikaraniwan ang mabi-itong (The initiatives) is always on the mayor's," Debonair said.

Bulguerin said the city's aggressive promotion of the Hundred Islands, the influx of foreign and local tourists in the city has increased by 50 percent during the July to December 2004 period as compared to the same period in 2003.

Timing

The turnover was timed with the week-long fiesta celebration of the city and came as a fitting present to local officials and residents.

The city government is allocating P5 million as an initial investment for its tourism projects anchored on the Hundred Islands, Bulguerin said.

The PTA is also planning to build an Olympic-size swimming pool at Lucap Point in Barangay Lucap to complement the development of the area at the Hundred Islands. Eric Montoya, PDI Northern Luzon Bureau

Mayor indicted for radioman's slay

By Nestor P. Burgos Jr.
PDI Visayas Bureau

ILOILO CITY—The Aklan provincial prosecutor's office has indicted Mayor Fred Arcenio of Ibajay, Aklan in last year's killing of broadcaster Remar "Boy" Hindelan.

In a 16-page resolution dated March 11 but released on March 15, assistant provincial prosecutor Apolinario Sierra said there was probable cause to charge Arcenio and an unidentified person for homicide.

Sierra ordered Arcenio's office that he was in Leon town when Hindelan was gunned down in the capital town of Kalibo, around 15 km away.

He said Arcenio's alibi "cannot prevail over the positive identification [of the suspect as the gunman by a witness]."

Sierra said the mayor failed to prove that it was physically impossible for him to be at the crime scene during the shooting. The prosecutor pointed out that Leon is only a 20-minute drive from Kalibo.

Reached for comment, Arcenio said he had yet to receive a copy of the resolution but he maintained he did not kill Hindelan.

"I'm disappointed because I have nothing to do with Boy's killing. We are both station heirs," he told the Inquirer in a telephone interview.

Arcenio said he also wants justice for Hindelan's family. He will extend his lawyer's services.

The police earlier filed a murder charge against two suspects, including Arcenio, after a witness, Peter Melgar, identified the mayor as the alleged gunman who reportedly shot Hindelan near a terminal in Kalibo on Nov. 13.

The 56-year old broadcaster died two days after the shooting from serious injuries that damaged his stomach and liver.

He was station manager of dyIN Radio-Radyo in Kalibo and hosted the station's morning program "Bandalusong Sigisay".

In his seven-page counter-affidavit filed on Jan. 14, Arcenio called the accusation "baseless and unsound."

He said Melgar's statement was "incredible" and contradicted the testimony of other prosecution witnesses.

He said he was in Leon during the time of the shooting. He supported his claim by submitting affidavits of seven witnesses citing [illegible] in their affidavit.

Sierra said there was no evidence that the shooting was premeditated because Melgar only saw the armed shooting but not the preceding events.

But Hindelan's widow Aglaiuldo said she is confident he charged will be made.

"I feel bad because my husband was shot in the back while attending," she said in a telephone interview. "Ginatakot ko na light for him."

A former Master Sergeant in the Army under the 47th Infantry Battalion, Arcenio was an army reservist in 2001.

Army asked to present detainee

MOLAVE, Zamboanga del Sur—Human rights activists joined the family of an arrested communist leader in Western Mindanao in demanding her whereabouts and restitution.

Bel Bustillo, elder brother of alleged communist rebel leader Ingrilyn Igsong, said the military has been refusing to release information regarding his sister.

Bustillo, accompanied by a lawyer, local religious personalities and members of the human rights group Karapatan, went twice to the headquarters of the Army's 1st Infantry Division in Labangan town purposely to inquire on Igsong's condition and whereabouts but they failed.

Bustillo said because of the military's refusal to provide details on his sister's condition, he would file a petition for the issuance of a writ of habeas corpus.

"We only saw her in a newspaper photo showing her blindfolded and guided by two escorts," Arnab Ibitz, Karapatan deputy secretary general for Western Mindanao, said. Agnes Bustillo, PDI Northern Luzon Bureau

ECOLOGY
Cavite Eco-Aides render "working on trips (with service)" at the Caylabne Bay Resort in a continuing campaign to clean the resort's shores of garbage, collecting the wastes under the hot sun of the sun.

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EMMANUEL F. DEGUARDO
Chairman

83-year-old water tower gives dilemma to San Fernando folk

By Tonyo Cruz
PDI Central Luzon Desk

CITY OF SAN FERNANDO—A water tank is a water tank.

But when it is 83 years old, one of the few remaining American colonial structures in this Pampanga capital and boasting like built's "Tower of Pisa, what would you do with it?

The city tourism council wanted the structure preserved but the City of San Fernando Water District (CSFWD) and the village council of Barangay Lourdes wanted it demolished.

On Thursday, the city council has stepped in in the matter when it began the first of three public consultations on the fate of what engineers here call "elevated, concrete water tank."

Used to be filled with 100,000 gallons, the tank signaled greater access to potable water. The tank's system of pipes, water was delivered to homes and ended the reliance of many families on deep wells.

It was the first structure to supply water in that district in the 251-year-old city, according to Jorge Gumba, CSFWD general manager.

Formerly managed by the defunct Bureau of Water and Sewerage Administration, the tank was decommissioned 10 years ago. Gumba said that was done on the recommendation of a British engineering consultant who found the structure unsafe.

Mr. Pinamber's suspicions in 1993 and the labor flows in the aftermath of the disaster buried the tank's base by less than 10 feet. The tank originally stood at 160 feet.

Today, it tilts several degrees southeast, in the direction of the San Fernando Elementary School. The tank stands on a 2,000-square-meter lot behind the school.

Gumba said its demolition was long due but was delayed by the rehabilitation of smaller, alternative tanks and installation of new pipes.

Last week, however, the barangay council of Lourdes passed a resolution asking the city council to destroy the tank.

Village chief Fernando Fredel said it posed threat to students in the school compound.

The village council, Fredel said, also plans to build a barangay hall, a day care center and a multi-purpose court on the same lot.

But that would depend on the CSFWD's decision whether to lend the village compound for public use.

The CSFWD board of directors on Wednesday agreed to defer the demolition.

But the board, according to Gumba, did not want to take liability for any accident that may result from the preservation of the tank.

Once total water pasts issues covered, it join on to San Fernando's landscape now dominated by advertising neon signs.

Fernando Gaton, chief of the city's tourism office, said the tourism council recognizes the loss of public safety and the need for public funds.

But conservation efforts, he said, need not be pitted against social needs.

THE WATER tower circa 1921.

Jinggoy seeks free access to dad in jail

By Jaime B. Bulambot
PDI Visayas Bureau

CEBU CITY—Sen. Jinggoy Estrada yesterday appealed to the government's "sense of compassion" to allow them free access to his father, deposed President Joseph Estrada, who is being detained in Tanay.

Estrada made the appeal while delivering his keynote speech to members of the League of the Municipalities in the Philippines-Cebu province chapter yesterday afternoon.

The senator, a former LMP national president, was the invited guest of the league's local chapter general assembly.

Estrada said he would not want a repeat of last Tuesday's incident when he and members of his family failed to visit Estrada, now garrisoned from visiting the former president, who is being held on plunder charges.

He said they were told that they could not see him because there were terrorists who were planning to get into the former president's detention center. But "all the movements done (I don't believe that)," he said.

The senator later clarified that an ambush intelligence that the family has been already allowed to visit the ailing Estrada after delivering a privilege speech in the Senate last Wednesday.

He said he was grateful to newly appointed Philippine National Police Director General Arturo Lomibao who immediately called him late Wednesday and informed him that the immediate family is permitted to visit the jailed president.

The younger Estrada said he was informed about the intelligence reports gathered by the police that "some terrorists might attack or enter the premises of Tanay," the supposed reason that prevented the immediate family from visiting the elder Estrada.

He said the prohibition was a "total violation of the law" as all detention prisoners are allowed by law to be visited by their immediate families, even by priests.

Estrada also criticized the Arroyo administration for making his father a "scapegoat" for the problems faced by the country.

He said the problem of graft and corruption has remained unsolved since President Macapagal-Arroyo assumed office.

However, when asked by one of the reporters here, Compostela Mayor Antonio Inaoga, whether the Estrada camp is open to reconciliation, the senator answered in positive.

But he clarified that reconciliation must be initiated by Arroyo's camp.

Consumer leader seeks sober dialogue over NLEx

A LEADER of a consumer organization called on all motors "to avoid extremist measures and find a common ground" for the business and industrial development of Pampanga and the entire Central Luzon," as three initiatives relating to opposition to the new North Luzon Expressway (NLE).

Nina Lapid Ingluis, founding member of Subang sa Kinabuhi ng Dilaang Lucas Aquino Mel (Sigbal), made this statement in the wake of protests staged by some sectors against the NLE, condemning the need to "convene more on things that matter, and do what, no."

Ingluis, also a member of the Regional Development Council (RDC), in a press statement declared her group's support for the new expressway, and invited others to a dialogue "so that we can open our eyes."

She said only last July 2004, she led the RDC, which she then co-chaired, in opposing the NLE and its alignment then.

"What a series of consultations ... we realize that we are better off working with them ...," she said.

Question of the Week

What do you think should be done to the vendors in Bohol who sold the cassava snacks that resulted in the deaths and poisoning of young school kids?

Senders of at least 25 texts as published in Tuesday's BagBox will each receive an "Inquirer Mug!"

INQUIRER Visayas

E-mail: ing_cebu@inquirer.com.ph

Cebu Jar Bandayrel
Baron Cruz/Edmajer L. Benedicto

Squadron guards the Visayan Sea

By Cassie E. Fernandez
Bantayan Island

GALDENCIO Peña may be 80 years old but this "old sea dog" is far from retirement. In fact, fire burns in his belly as he looks forward to sail, this time as a volunteer of the Visayan Sea Squadron (VSS).

Peña, or Manong Dodong to his friends, is one of about 200 people, including government officials and fisherfolk, who signed up for the squadron on a long mission to "conserve, protect and restore" the wealth of the sea.

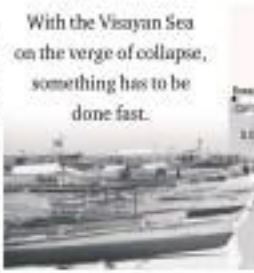
"I love the sea. I have been a diving instructor for 50 years and I care how beautiful the sea was. But over the years, I have also seen how it has deteriorated," said Manong Dodong, a former pilot and air traffic controller. He said he wanted to do his share to restore and protect the sea for his five children and eight grandchildren.

The Visayan Sea, comprising almost one million hectares, is the heart of the Sulu Sea-Inner Basins Triangle, bounded by Philippines, Indonesia and Malaysia.

Considered the richest marine eco-region in the world, covering the Visayan provinces of Iloilo, Cebu, Negros Occidental and Masbate, it was once dubbed the "Alaska of the Philippines" because it contained as many fish species and corals, more than the entire Caribbean Sea.

Like anything in abundance, the Visayan Sea has been abused. Destructive fishing methods, such as the use of explosives and cyanide, and even fishing have taken their toll on Visayan Sea. Ninety-five percent of marine life and 99 percent of corals have been lost as a result.

With the Visayan Sea on the verge of collapse, something has to be done fast.



Enough is enough to what they are fighting for and to create many illegal fishers, Dipsonia said.

He said the team would spend five to six days per trip from March to June 30, this year up to 2010.

The squadron intends to conduct 80 "exploratory" during the five-year period, to enforce conduct patrol operations in July when the rainy season starts.

Operations

The 800 members will conduct patrol operations and aid to a coastal town considered a "hot spot" to conduct a survey on the marine resources. This month, their first stop will be southern Cebu.

The group will report its findings to the elder executive of local government and concerned, with a warning that it will be back within one year to check if something has been done. If no action was taken, charges of neglect of duty will be charged against the mayor before the environmental Ombudsman.

The VSS will then advise the mayor that at least 75 percent of the municipal waters must be devoted to a marine sanctuary in accordance with Republic Act No. 8550 or the Philippines Code of the Philippines.

Volunteers will also organize the fisherfolk, especially the youth, and teach them about the need to conserve and protect seas. The youth will be taught about the law to help eradicate illegal fishing in their area.

As some of its volunteers are lawyers, the group will assist the cities in drafting anti-illegal fishing ordinances and in similar jurisdictions. They will assist the fisherfolk in developing options for sustainable alternative sources of livelihood.

The Law of Nature Foundation, headed by Dipsos, will serve as central team leader to establish the activities and call on other government agencies to help enforce and prosecute cases of illegal fishing.

The foundation, along with the integrated Bar of the Philippines and the Philippine Bar Association, will form a legal panel to assist squadron members who may be the subject of a harassment suit while performing their duties.

Maiden voyage

The VSS was launched at the Bantayan Marine Sanctuary at Sta. Fe on March 11. Governors Gwendolyn Garcia of Cebu, Joseph Marañon of Negros and Neptali Gonzales and Neil Tupas of Iloilo, and Environment Secretary Michael Defensor and his predecessor, Elisa Kintes, came in a show of support and commitment to the campaign.

About 200 people, including local officials of Bantayan, Cebu and Masbate, PNP officials, personnel from the NBI, Coast Guard, Department of Environment and Natural Resources and the Navy, divers and fishers, signed a "Bantayan Island Declaration of Commitment" as an expression of their "collective will to restore the abundance and former glory of the Visayan Sea."

They vowed to post their resources and to take a "unified" VSS squadron.

The local officials promised to give their

THE VISAYAN Sea Squadron was launched at the Bantayan Marine Sanctuary in Sta. Fe, Cebu on March 11.

to case their friends, relatives or political leaders were caught and later prosecuted for illegal fishing.

"Any person or public official who will unduly interfere shall be reported to the team leader. The team leader shall then create the investigation and, where warranted, file filing of the appropriate charges against the person for obstruction of justice, or if a public official, for violation of the Code of Conduct of Public Officials, Anti-Graft and Corrupt Practices, violation of human rights, etc.," it entailed.

The signatories agreed to review and harmonize their ordinances in accordance to the standard set by the Fisheries Code.

The VSS squadron appears to be a unique an ambitious campaign, but with the political will, determination and commitment of the people involved, especially the committed local officials, it can be done.

They only have to remember one thing: "In the face of nature, there is no right or wrong, no reward or punishment, but only consequences."

Those interested to extend help in the form of volunteer efforts, funds, logistics and moral support may email Bantayan nature@aol.com.

Cop chief gets 'persona non grata' label

LUCENA CITY—The city legislative council has declared Quezon police chief, Senior Supt. Leo Ilustre, as "persona non grata" after Ilustre snubbed several invitations for him to appear before the local officials.

Resolution No. 11-146, authored by Councilor Rey Olivier Alejandrino during the regular session on March 14, said Ilustre has been invited to appear in the session six at least five occasions but the police official failed to show up.

The council said Ilustre's non-appearance "has prejudiced the welfare and interest of the people" of Lucena City.

The council said the police official did not even bother to reply to communications sent to him.

"The said police officer has even boasted in a radio interview that he is not in any way under the Sanggunian Panglungsod of Lucena City," the resolution said.

The local officials said Ilustre acted in bad faith and did not abide by his oath as an officer and a gentleman.

But Ilustre explained that it was not by intention to snub the city council.

"It just so happened that I always have previous commitments with my superiors in Camp Crame before I received their invitations," he told the Inquirer.

He said he even sent one of his senior police officials or his representative to the last invitation.

"Besides, as far as what I understand, what they have sent me were mere invitations and not subpoena duces tecum to appear before them. Meaning, it still depends on my availability of time, which I did not have the luxury in the specified time of the invitation due to earlier commitments," Ilustre said.

He said the author of the resolution has no axe to grind against him after the recent relief of Lucena City police chief, Supt. Hero Francis Bocobo.

"Councilor Alejandrino probably thinks that I have a hand in the relief of superintendent Bocobo, his best friend. The order came from Camp[ ] and not from me," Ilustre said.

On March 14, Supt. Ground Cajot replaced Bocobo as the new Lucena police chief.

Ilustre had been on the spot last week after one of his policemen came out in the open and pointed at him as the one who ordered the assassination of a local radio broadcaster.

However, Ilustre strongly denied the allegations. *Doffie Maglaya Jr., PDI Southern Luzon Bureau*

Solon seeks arrest of Pampanga treasurer on quarry

By Tonette Orejas
PDI Central Luzon Desk

CITY OF SAN FERNANDO—The vice chair of the House committee on natural resources recommended the arrest of a Pampanga official who said he has not seen fake receipts and did not know that these were being used in the provincial government's collection of road taxes.

Dumaguete Rep. Jose Isidro, vice chair of the House committee on natural resources that was investigating the quarry income, ordered the arrest of Pampanga treasurer Angel Salud for "contempt and lies" during the hearing on Wednesday.

But Isidro withheld his recommendation on the appeal of Bayan Oriental Rep. Jacinto Paras and Cambanga Ad Norte Rep. Emilio Santiago for clar presence.

Salud earned the ire of the members of the committee who found it unbelievable that he was unaware of the anomaly.

Iguisan del Norte Rep. Leovigilde Panang, committee chair, ordered Salud and ordered him to give accurate statements in the next hearings.

Pampanga Rep. Juan Miguel Arroyo accused Salud of "making a mockery of the mandate of the committee."

Arroyo said it was impossible for Salud not to know about the alleged irregularity when there were published reports on this and when Vice Gov. Jumbo Guino-opposed this in a privilege speech on Jan. 24.

Solis complained Salud to excite his bold and flustered as treasurer.

"I will recommend for your dismissal," Solis warned.

"You have fixed the papers so your group would not be pinned down," Arroyo told Salud on Yabut's activities in the past weeks.

Barua called for other provincial officials to testify.

"We don't know if this person is protecting somebody" he said.

Guino said Yabut and other members of the provincial finance committee had also declined requests for them to attend hearings called for by the provincial board on quarry operations.

Yabut was placed on the hot seat after provincial administrator Eded Arcinue referred Bataan Rep. Romeo Magpale's question on fake receipts to the treasurer.

Yabut swore that he assumed the post in April 2004. But he moved the post in an acting capacity since September 2003, Arroyo disclosed.

Magpale disputed claims by Arcinue that said revenues reached P5.6 million from January to March 15 due to "innovations" in the collection system.

GMA visits fast-expanding service provider firm

HEADQUARTERS Macapagal-Arroyo recently visited the facility in Dumaguete City of one of the fastest growing service providers in the country-owned by Filipino-founded firm that is now recognized as one of the world's leaders in the business.

The facility is owned by SPI Technologies Inc. and is intended primarily for the company's publishing services operations.

It is part of a P3-billion expansion program that SPI is aggressively pursuing this year, said Jesus Co, president and chief executive officer, in a press conference.

The 25-year-old SPI has evolved into a multi-country service provider with more than 6,000 specialists in 23 locations across the United States, Europe and Asia. About 40 percent, or 4,000, of the company's workforce is in the Philippines.

The addition of 400 more in Dumaguete will boost SPI's editorial and copy-editing services by over 300 journal titles for some of the world's leading scholarly, scientific, technical, and medical (STM) publishers, etc.

Co said SPI is confident it can compete favorably in the global STM publishing market. The Dumaguete facility is SPI's second center for publishing services and complements its other units in Manila and the Indian cities of Bangalore, Kolkata, and New Delhi.

SPI is growing rapidly in its target markets. Recently, it signed an agreement to buy the medical transcription business of India-based IGate Information Services Private Ltd. (IGATE).

IAN BELLORO, senior vice president of the SPI Technologies, gives Ms Arroyo a briefing on the firm's Dumaguete expansion.

ROUNDUP

Probe on buildings lease urged

SAN JUANCHO, Nueva Vizcaya — Parents of school children in this town have asked the Department of Education to investigate the alleged massive distranding of the government by many school officials for entering lease-to-build buildings on publicly-specified cadastres. Ma. Asmen Cacatal, vice-president of a parent-teacher community association, assailed the officials' alleged anomalous practice of leasing school buildings, the payment for which, she said, are not being remitted to the government coffers. Cacatal said the monthly rentals of school canteens are neither remitted to the government nor pass through the Commission on Audit.

Alexis Cuerpo, PDI Northern Luzon Bureau

Village dad sued for logging

ORION, Bataan — Environment officials in Pilar town on Friday sued eleven gap operators and two other for illegal logging. Officials of the community environment and natural resources office filed the charges against Serafino Vargas, councilman of Barangay Central Lim, and his brother, Basilio. Police said the suspects were at least following a tip from residents that the Vargas brothers were involved in illegal logging. Seized from the brothers' house were 200 board feet of illegally-cut logs taken from the forested area near the foot of Mt. Samat Shrine in Pilar.

Greg Rafael Ilon, PDI Central Luzon Desk

3 held for fake cigarettes

CALAMBA CITY— Police arrested three men on Friday while they were delivering fake brand cigarettes to several customers in the city market. Arrested were Anthony Arabella, 35, Alexis Llamera, 19, and Wilson Rosales, 18, all of Pansacola. Seized from them were 48 packs of fake Winston cigarettes. Police officials have said a representative of tobacco firm Tobacco Corp., the manufacturer of Winston, sought the help of the police to stop the proliferation of fake Winston cigarettes in the city market.

Greg Rafael Ilon, PDI Central Luzon Desk

Fish sanctuaries for tourism

CITY OF CALAPAN — Provincial planning and development coordinator Isaac Tolada said the provincial government is boosting tourism in the province by pushing up the Mindoro Wildlife Protection Center and developing 12 fish sanctuaries as tourism sites. He said they were also working up with the Provincial Tourism Code and Provincial Tourism Master Plan, which are aligned with the Tourism Development Plan under The Mindoro Integrated Development Plan for 2000-2020. Tolada said agriculture and tourism are two major programs in the 15-year strategic development plan brought about by the Strategic Republic Natural Highway in Bi-lateral Ministers.

Mabinson Virola, PDI Southern Luzon Bureau

Mindoro Port construction

CITY OF CALAPAN — Philippine Ports Authority Port Services Division manager Efren Leynes said the construction of the Batalaran port in Batalaran, the southernmost town of Oriental Mindoro, is now under way. The opening of the port will speed up trade to Boracay, Palawan and Antique, according to Dexter Centenar, Jr., executive assistant of the Batalaran mayor's office. Leynes also announced that the construction of the P150 million Polo port in Barangay Tigaharanan already been completed. The port will open trips to Batangas, Mindoro, Cebu and other nearby ports.

Mabinson Virola, PDI Southern Luzon Bureau

Lack of contraceptives

SORSOGON, Oriental Mindoro — The campaign for safe pregnancy and responsible parenthood is doing good but there is not enough medicine from the government, according to Victoria Marquez, midwife supervisor from the Department of Health - Provincial Office in charge of reproductive health. Marquez said the office has been disseminating information through house-to-house visits and assemblies. She said the 2004 Oriental Mindoro targets 25 percent of the province's more than 100,000 population.

Mabinson Virola, PDI Southern Luzon Bureau

US to deport Lacson aide, says NBI official

[illegible] aide [illegible] could [illegible] be easily made the target," he said.

Aquino and Cesar Mancao also face murder charges in connection with the November 2000 abduction and murder of publicist Salvador "Bubby" Dacer and his driver Emmanuel Corbito.

Sgt. Glenn Dumlao had tagged Aquino and Mancao as the masterminds, along with several other members of the Achieve Presidential Anti-Organized Crime Task Force, which Lacson once headed.

Undocumented aliens

NBI Director Reynaldo Wycoco said the Department of Foreign Affairs had earlier canceled Aquino and Mancao's travel papers, making them "undocumented aliens" in the United States.

The two men were able to flee the country in July 2001, despite hold-departure orders issued in May of that year. They were said to have flown to Hong Kong on fake passports, and later to the United States on genuine travel documents.

But Dita announced yesterday that the NBI had re-activated to arrest Aquino because the court had rejected Dumlao's statement linking him and Mancao to the murders.

"We have no authority to cancel him. We can only post him on the watch list," Wycoco said, adding that authorities were still looking for Mancao.

Responding to Lacson's statement on Thursday that the NBI's disclosure of Aquino's arrest was malicious and intended to pressure him to endorse the confirmation of Justice Secretary Raul Gonzalez, Wycoco said: "Mr. senator, indeed (Aquino) is my civic religious-political leader."

Aquino, a 1990 graduate of the Philippine Military Academy, had denied involvement in the murder and coup conspiracy surrounding him.

He and Mancao are also charged with robbery in connection with the Labor Day siege of Malacañang in 2001, and, together with Lacson and several other police officers, with taking trafficking, murder, kidnapping, serious illegal detention and wiretapping. *Marlene G. Dela*

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ENROLLMENT STILL GOING ON

No way Malacañang supporting . . .

[illegible] Gabrielle women's group, filed the other day House Bill No. 4634 which seeks to allow couples to apply for divorce if they had been separated for five years and had been legally separated for two years.

The party-list representative claimed that Philippine society was now ready for the legalization of divorce. She also asserted that her bill would provide enough safeguards to ensure that the institution of marriage and family were not destroyed.

No divorce only in RP, Malta

The Philippines is the last nation on earth, besides the tiny Mediterranean island state of Malta, where divorce is not legal. And, like contraception, the issue is seldom openly discussed for fear of incurring the wrath of the Catholic Church which still holds considerable influence over the country's politics and government.

But with a growing number of women demanding the right to divorce in the archipelago notorious for its controversial subject is now back on the political agenda.

The last attempt to legalize divorce in the Philippines was made during the last Congress (2001-2004). Despite being well-backed, the bill died in the Congress floor without a vote.

So don't marry

Not even a "Pinoy-style" divorce bill was acceptable to the Catholic Church to allow the dissolution of marriage.

Lingayen-Dagupan archbishop Oscar Cruz yesterday held that the bill filed by party-list Rep. Liza Maza, using the Church law way to "twist" efforts like this.

"They came and go and this is not something new," Cruz, past president of the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines, told reporters. "The Church is more than 2,000 years old and it's still standing. But those who filed divorce bills in the past are already gone. It's really difficult to go against the Church."

He said he sees would be the fate of the controversial Reproductive Personhood and Population Management Act of 2005, an effort the Church has described as sexually "unviable."

Cruz, a Canon Law expert, said a divorce law would go against the "... constitutional provision of the state protecting the family as the basic unit of society.

"If you have all these issues to dissolve family ties, then either you amend the Constitution to accommodate (those of you) who are pro married (spouses)," he said.

And contrary to what Maza proclaim, many people claim, Msgr. Bernardo Garcinal, Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines secretary general, said the Church has ways to deal with broken marriages.

Garcinal spoke of a century of Church-initiated programs to "reveal" those in irregular with the help of the

In May last year, President Ricardo Lagos signed a law legalizing civil divorce in Chile despite strong opposition from the Catholic Church.

Chile

Chile's divorce law was passed by Congress after 10 years of debate. It replaced legislation which had been in effect for 120 years. More than 75 percent of Chileans are Catholic.

Where Chile legalized divorce, also of fourth country, which is predominantly Catholic, allow divorce.

Ireland

Ireland, another mostly Catholic nation, legalized divorce in 1995 when "The Family Law (Divorce) Act" became law. For years, Ireland which is about 91 percent Catholic, was the only European country without a divorce law.

Spain, which brought Catholicism to the country more than 200 years ago, managed to legalize divorce in 1981 after a bitter fight with the Church.

The Philippines is favored for a win, for barely. *With AFP, PNA Research*

Holy week plot real–PNP

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suspect in the Zamboanga City 2000 bombing, Abu Hashim, who allegedly trained recently in Mt. Cararao in Lanao, Abu Omar, Abu Turik, an explosives expert alleged by trained by the Jemaah Islamiyah (JI); Abu Zaid, and Abu Yasir, an Indonesian, JI member.

Police have distributed sketch es of the supposed bombers, except for Turik and Zaid, in various newsstands.

Asked if the attacks were intended as retaliation for the killing of Abu Sayyaf Commanders Boaway, Global and Bebot, Lumbao said, "It could be, because as we heard Abu Solaiman over the radio, he was trying to warn or tell everybody that they will unleash retaliatory attacks as a result of what happened in [Camp Bagong Diwa].

"That's one factor that we are trying to consider. Second, the Holy Week is fast approaching. With these two conditions, we feel we should upgrade our security measures."

On radar screen

According to Sulaiman, Solaiman reiterated recently in his text to quit the bombings "very recently".

"They have always been on our radar screen," he said. "Only recently have we obtained information that the order to conduct terrorist activities has been terminated [earlier]."

A senior intelligence official speaking on condition of anonymity said Solaiman was furious because a relative.

Lumbao appealed to the public to immediately inform the police or military of "suspicious-looking" persons in their communities. "Call 117, text 2600 or go to the nearest police or military station," he said.

Sulaiman said information on Solaiman's order had come from police and military sources, and affirmed by the Department of Justice's own reports.

Gappal Sana, a key suspect in the Valentine's Day bomb attack in Makati City, has supposedly also "validated" the information.

"For the past two days, we have received additional information that they [Abu Sayyaf members] are really bent on pursuing their terrorist activities," Sulaiman said.

No terrorist group

Lumbao took pains to say that Muslim converts, or members of the Tabli Islam movement, were not terrorists.

"Please, let us not create the Tablighs as a terrorist organization," he said. "Let that be [made] clear to everybody. Let it be clear. It is not a terrorist organization. What we are saying is that some [of its] members are influenced by terrorists."

Lumbao also said the supposed bombing targets were populated areas like shopping malls, public markets and bus terminals.

He said the supposed bombings were meant to save some "not only domestically but also economically."

The PNP is not discarding the possibility of a car bomb.

"We are considering that," Lumbao said. "These were not bomb-wizard, as ... part of the training could be in car bombing."

Still being verified

On the other hand, Director Avelino Razon, chief of the National Capital Region Police Office, said he supposed that Sayyaf bomb plot was still being verified.

Nevertheless, he said, the PNP had beefed up security to high-risk areas to prevent the alleged plot from succeeding.

"We can't wait for the realization to happen. Even if the information has not been confirmed, we're putting in place security measures to deter the achieved the terrorists," he said.

Speaking in a forum at a hotel in Manila, Razon confirmed that the PNP has received information on the supposed planned bombing of churches from a suspected Abu Sayyaf member involved in association with the Salonga's Day bombing in Makati.

He said he had alerted all district directors and station commanders to enforce precautionary measures in their areas.

Razon also said he would mobilize "force multipliers"—or barangay officials who are in charge of securing their communities—to augment patrol teams.

He said he was considering meeting with church groups on the matter of security.

The PNP is also working to recruit ties with Muslim communities following the bloody end to the crisis in Camp Bagong Diwa.

Razon said that he met yesterday with 19 Muslim leaders, and that the latter signified support for Lumbao.

He said he had also explained to the Muslim leaders the reason behind the police's decision to storm the prison facility that the suspected Abu Sayyaf members had put under siege.

"We presented to our Muslim brothers the incidents report. We explained to them that the crisis management committee exerted all efforts to arrive at a peaceful resolution to the incident," Razon said.

Bishops not worried

Not even the bishops are worried about the supposed bomb threats from the Abu Sayyaf.

Activities are for the Holy Week will proceed as planned, said Lingayen-Dagupan Archbishop Oscar Cruz.

"Churches will be open," he told reporters. "Priests will go about their duties. Masses will proceed to be at church services are mastered."

Bro. Eliseo Fernando Coronel, secretary-general of the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines, advised the public to "take life necessary precautions."

"It's always better to be safe," he said.

Cruz, a former CBCP president, did not seem convinced that the Abu Sayyaf would go to the extent of bombing churches as part of its terrorist activities. With reports from Christine O. Avendaño and Christian V. Esguerra

'Very good job'

By SAHLAN, President Macapagal-Arroyo said she had told the men in the agencies in charge of preserving public security:

"I think the security agencies that we have are doing a very, very good job of taking care of our security, and I want you to intensify manage when the agencies are doing a very good job," she told reporters.

The President and authorities had put security measures in place:

"There is no reason for the public to be alarmed," her spokesperson, Press Secretary Ignacio Bunye, said in a statement he issued in Malacañang and in a news briefing later.

Saudi man detained, then released at Naia

A SAUDI Arabian man, detained for suspected al-Qaeda links after arriving at the Ninoy Aquino International Airport, was turned over to the Saudi ambassador yesterday after investigators failed to find any evidence against him, Bureau of Immigration officials said.

The man, identified by the officials as Saudi Arabian national Abdullah Hassan al-Asiri, 34, appears on a US Federal Bureau of Investigation list of terror suspects, the officials told The Associated Press on condition of anonymity.

Asiri arrived in Manila on March 16 on board Philippine Air Lines (PAL) 655 at 12:44 p.m. from Riyadh, according to Nasuhaid Ampuri, Naia immigration chief.

Ampuri said the suspect's name was on the bureau's watch list, prompting the immigration officials to detain him. He was later brought to the BI main office in Intramuros, Manila for further interrogation.

Ampuri said Al-Asiri had travelled alone and claimed to have gone here for a vacation.

Asiri's passport and date of birth jived with the list," Immigration Commissioner Alipio Fernandez told GMMB radio.

The officials said earlier the man may have links to the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks in the United States, as well as the 2002 bombings in Bali, Indonesia.

But an investigation—which the officials said included the US Federal Bureau of Investigation—failed to link him to terrorism, and Al-Asiri was turned over to the Saudi ambassador on Friday, said an immigration intelligence official who declined to be identified.

Ampuri said Al-Asiri would still be deported to Saudi Arabia because his name was on the US list. Reports by Gelle B. Galauteria, Nikko Dizon and AP

Moro solon hits PNP . . .

From page A1

ers that it be halted that the dead were mere mortals.

Hataman has filed a bill in Congress declaring March 18 "Bangsamoro Day," to commemorate the Jabidah massacre on March 18, 1968.

On that day, at least 28 Muslim recruits being trained in Corregidor in jungle warfare for "Operation Merdeka," a planned invasion of Sabah, were killed by supposed Army men.

The government never made public the results behind the massacre, but a survivor said the recruits were shot dead because they refused to take part in the invasion of the territory claimed by both the Philippines and Malaysia.

Hataman said the bill would help correct history lessons being taught in schools portraying Muslims as "barbarians."

Irresponsible

Hataman said government officials should be circumspect and avoid making inflammatory statements.

He said Pimentel's critique of Tablighi missionaries—that their teachings were contributing to the spread of extremism among Muslims—was "irresponsible."

"I hope he will correct this statement. He should know what he is talking about. The Tablighi only teaches proper conduct and prayer," Hataman said, citing his own experience in a Tablighi meeting.

Hataman also said that while police should be vigilant for terror attacks, statements like the justice department's warning of a purported Abu Sayyaf plot to bomb churches during Holy Week was alarmist.

"We should be on alert at all times, but we do not want to broadcast for the whole world to know that there is going to be an attack," Hataman said.

He said this would again warn on the relationship between Christian and Muslim communities.

Ending the violence

As it is, the relationship has been strained to the point of burying.

Days after the bloody incident in Camp Bagong Diwa, a tricycle driver killed one in a seminar who had just emerged from her home in Cotabato, Rhael. "Hey, Abu Sabayaf!"

The woman was wearing Muslim garb. Abu Sayyaf was the Abu Sayyaf spokesperson who, according to the military, was killed last year in Zamboanga del Norte.

In the Quezon City home of a prominent Muslim family, a 6-year-old boy asserted the law TV report on the assault and said, "When I grow up, I will fight the non-Muslims."

These are just some of the responses from ordinary Muslims and Christians that the Peacemakers' Circle is trying to address.

"Violence that is met with violence also produces more violence," said Peacemakers' Circle executive director Bishop Mina. "We must put an end to this cycle of violence."

Above a dozen members of the group met on Thursday to reflect on the events that led to the killing of 22 men, including a police official, in Camp Bagong Diwa.

The group's message is simple and unequivocal. Peace requires everyone's efforts.

"It requires hard work. Peace will only come if we all work to achieve it," said Alim Sattia Abdul Wahid of the Ummatul Muslihin.

"Peace is not just words. I hope everyone will remember that," the Islamic scholar said.

The group plans to hold an interfaith prayer on March 21 on Jolo, on the spot where a bomb exploded on Valentine's Day, killing two persons and wounding several others.

More terrorist than others

"We do not want to assign blame on anyone. But you know the Abu Sayyaf killed their guards. They are terrorists. Then the police killed 22 more men. Those who killed the innocent, they are more terrorist than the others," said Ustadz Ahmad Sharif of the Ittoy Qadria Mosque.

"Where will the killing stop?" she said.

Some members of the group shed tears when Rtd. Djalia Sakaluran, secretary general of the Moro Human Rights Center and wife of Congressman Hataman, read a statement on the death of the 22 Muslims during the assault.

Clapping his hands

Rtd Djalia said she was particularly hurt when she saw Interior Secretary Angelo Reyes clapping his hands after the assault.

"He was clapping his hands at what?" she said. "At the death of 22 Muslims?"

She also said those behind the jailbreak attempt on Monday must pay for the death of the jail guards. But what about the others who were killed, including a 75-year-old detainee who met his fate?" she said.

Rtd Djalia said many of those in jail with the Abu Sayyaf were facing trial. They were still suspects, she stressed.

"But still, we [must be] for peace. We believe that this violence will not justify the killing of innocent civilians—Muslims, Christians and whoever faith they may have," she said.

"We do not confuse peace, we do so cry for justice, for there can never be peace where there is no justice," she added.

Persecution

Mohammad Sana, a former priest and a Muslim convert, said he became afraid for his family when a tricycle driver called his wife "Abu Sabaya."

"My wife had just stepped out of our home when I heard the yell. I got really afraid for her, and for other Muslims," he said.

Other members of the Peacemakers' Circle group narrated how they had faced similar persecution, usually by authorities.

Islamic scholar Ibrahim Mora said he was forced to close a madrasah (Islamic school) in Manila early this month when the authorities came looking for him and another teacher, Mohammad Sey.

Mora said he had apparently been tagged a terrorist, too.

"Now the children are asking why their school is closed," said Sey. "They told me that if children are tagged as terrorists, they might as well become terrorists. This should not be happening."

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

BUSINESS

Editor Raul D. Pangalangan
Assistant Editor Connie S. Mariano

2-month BIR collection up 12.7%

By Doris C. Dumlao

THE BUREAU of Internal Revenue, the government's main tax agency, yesterday said its collections in January and February rose 12.7 percent from year-ago.

Its February collection of P32.67 billion, which was up by 13 percent from last year, brought the two-month figure to P73.69 billion, or P8.3 billion higher than last year's level.

The two-month collection represents 44 percent of the BIR's revenue goal for the first quarter of P111.23 billion.

For the whole year, the agency expects collection to rise by 17 percent, helped by a new law that raised taxes on alcohol and tobacco products, and some administrative measures.

In an interview, Revenue Commissioner Guillermo Parayno said the BIR, which accounts for three-fourths of the total government revenue, would likely meet its first quarter target.

"The role of thumb is if by the 14th of any month, we already hit more than 50 percent of the target, it's a good indication that we'll hit the target for the whole month because two-third of our collection comes in the second half with the payment of value added tax and the 1[illegible] income payment and filing returns," Parayno said.

The BIR started implementing several administrative measures in January and February that provided to boost collections in the coming months. These are as follow:

- the electronic reporting of monthly sales via "tracing" or data return messaging system, email and BIR portal;
- the mandatory EFPS for government contractors and the submission of proof of withholding tax compliance as a precondition for supply of goods and services to the government; and,
- the mandatory submission of BIR-received income tax returns and financial statements as condition for obtaining loan from banks.

During the two-month period, the large taxpayers service collected P40.71 billion or 55.46 percent of the total. This was surpassed as cumulative collections for the same period last year by P5.14 billion or 14.45 percent.

The collections of regional offices grew at a slower rate of 10.07 percent, hitting P32.98 billion or P3.31 billion lower than the two-month period a year ago.

"The highly computerized document system for tax employs even [illegible]

Manila Water share price up on debut

By Elizabeth L. Sardea

MANILA Water Co. Inc., the Ayala-led water concessionaire, debuted on the stock market yesterday with its shares closing at P5.20 a share or 4.1 percent higher than its offer price of P5.00.

MWC is the country's first major public offering for the year and the first conducted [illegible] since 1997.

However, the stock market's sharp fall yesterday spoiled MWC's maiden trade. The stock opened at P5.05 per share but its gains were trimmed during the trading to close at P4.90 per share. The total value of trade reached P1.28 billion, involving 141 million shares bought and sold.

"The MWC debut was spoiled by foreign investors' apparent failure to get the MWC stocks added into indexed investment share before it goes on record," Philippine Equity Partners head of investment [illegible] said.

MWC offered 741.37 million shares consisting of new and previously owned shares, fetching P4.8 billion.

Company president Jose [illegible] Aguirre said MWC would likely increase the issued shares within the next 90 days to bring the offer size to 825 million shares, which would raise for the company P5.4 billion.

Of its total offer, 90 percent was bought by foreign investors while the remaining 10 percent was earmarked for local buyers.

[illegible] A2

MANILA Water chair Fernando Zobel de Ayala rings the ceremonial bell on the trading floor of the Philippine Stock Exchange to mark the start of yesterday's trading and the listing of the water utility. Watching are Trade Secretary Jose Santos (left) and PSE president Antonio Aquino.

BOARD ELECTION

Fireworks seen to mark PSE vote

By Elizabeth L. Sanchez

PROVIDENCE are expected to go off at the Philippine Stock Exchange today when the bourse holds its annual election of board members.

Bitter politicking among the top contending power blocs at the bourse and the issue of non-brokers voting in today's election have been hounding the PSE.

Yvonne Mahuli broker Yvonne Yuchengco heads a group that will oppose the power bloc of Manila broker Robert Coyiuto Jr. and PSE chair Alicia Rita Aboitiz.

Aboitiz is running with Conrado Ruiz, president of CitiSecurities, Luis Villa, Inc., and Alexandrino Paul Sit Lim & Co.

Aboitiz hogged the Outstanding Women in the Nation's Service (TOWNS) award for business sector the week exchange surgeon.

"My commitment to TOWNS is that I have to work on the category [where I won]," Aboitiz told Inquirer. "My team with Citisec Ruiz and All Ye has a business development agenda."

If elected, Aboitiz would be serving her third term at the bourse.

Aboitiz has been PSE chair since 2003. Aboitiz said she would continue to push for business development "and ensure that reforms are implemented."

Some brokers are questioning Aboitiz's nomination, alleging that she does not represent a brokerage firm.

But the PSE nominations and elections committee chair Rodolfo Cruz was quick to come to her defense. He said that the PSE chart, Presidential Decree 1, requires only "at least a director of PCSE [securities and therefore qualified to run as PSE director.

Cruz also formed an independent group, meeting with PSE director Eddie Gobing and former PSE president Ramon Garcia.

He denied he has stuck an alliance with Aboitiz.

Cruz also said the bourse he is fighting for transparency and good governance.

Yuchengco, on the other hand, is pushing to implement the small investors loan of the stock market and has reforms under the Investors Regulation Code governing market participants.

Also yesterday, BA Securities president William Ang questioned the authority of Investment Trust (ITC) Elite Ang Securities Inc. to vote its shares in the PSE.

Ang, in a letter to the PSE corporate secretary said that based on the PSE's list of stockholders as of Feb. 28, ATC SC Securities has a total of 1.46 million shares listed under its name. Ang said that under ATC is a PSE broker and legally prohibited from acquiring any PSE shares due to conflict of interest, the 1.46 million shares are held on behalf of beneficial owners which should be exercise as SEC rules.

The SEC has ordered broker-dealers to submit valid proxies issued in favor of their clients or a written certificate stating that their broker-dealers had been authorized by their clients to vote their respective shares accompanied by written authorization from their clients to recognize beneficial ownership.

Ang said ATC merely submitted a "sell-to-vote" certification stating that it has been authorized to vote the clients' shares without the required written authorization from the clients themselves and that it shouldn't be allowed to vote today.

ATC for its part said it has all the necessary documents to vote its shares.

Over the last two years, the PSE elections have been marred by controversies over the election of non-brokers who control a majority of the board.

YVONNE Yuchengco

ROBERT Coyiuto Jr.

ALICIA Rita Aboitiz

San Miguel bent on acquiring Australian food firm

SAN MIGUEL Corp., Southeast Asia's biggest food and beverage conglomerate, said it was still keen on taking over Australian dairy giant National Foods Ltd.

"Important for San Miguel's followers of by its National Foods shares remains open for acceptance. San Miguel Corp. has not changed its intentions in relation to National Foods' business, assets or employees and is not aware of any information material to it whether Australian shareholders should accept San Miguel's offer or not, which has not previously been disclosed in its original bidder's statement," Patrick Ho-ling, director of San Miguel Foods Australia Holdings Pty, said in a disclosure to the Australian stock Exchange Ltd.

SMC made this disclosure to the ASX Ltd. lowing reports it was eyeing the possible entry into New Zealand Dairy Board, maker of the Anchor milk.

SCDF is reportedly worth as much as $327.00 million.

Riley said that should SMC change to mind about taking over National Foods, it would make the proper disclosure with the ASX.

SMC has recently extended its takeover bid for National Foods to April 15 as it vies others seeking its A$1.78 billion offer, after rival Dairy Farmers Cooperative Group Ltd. hiked its bid to A$1.84 billion.

"San Miguel Corp. has a long-term strategy of growing its beverages and food businesses in selected markets in the Asia Pacific region. As would be expected, San Miguel Corp. reviews proposals for and investigates business development opportunities of all kinds in the region including acquisitions and commercial arrangements," Riley added.

SMC said it has "prior commitments" to buying New Zealand Dairy Foods, which operates in the milk, cheese and yoghurt markets in New Zealand.

SMC added that its studies were still in the preliminary stages.

"Whether or not San Miguel Corp. will proceed with an offer for New Zealand Dairy Foods, and on what terms, is not decided at this point," Riley added.

Analysts had said SMC was keen on taking a big slice of the food and beverage markets in Australasia and New Zealand as part of its bid to be among Asia-Pacific's top 50 companies in three years.

"SMC is in nominal landmass but targets anyway as their objective is to increase foreign exposure," an analyst of a local brokerage firm said.

New Zealand's The Dominion Post, reported that New Zealand's richest man, Graeme Hart and owner of NZDF was sounding out potential buyers for the dairy foods group, which owns popular brands like Anchor, Perfect Pastry and Primtal.

New Zealand Dairy Foods owners mainly half the milk market in New Zealand, about a quarter of the cheese market and a quarter of the yoghurt market, which is the fastest-growing segment of the dairy market.

SMC has announced a number of acquisitions in the region in the past few months. Its top bid for National Foods, worth roughly A$1.78 billion, is the biggest so far. Last month it launched a US$1.8 billion syndicated loan to finance the proposed purchase.

Elizabeth Sanchez

Premiere's planned purchase of Nextel won't push through

By Clarissa S. Bedna

PREMIERE Entertainment Productions Inc. yesterday said an agreement forged in March 2004 related to its acquisition of Next Mobile Inc. has lapsed and would not be extended.

PEP acquired 40% of Next from three major shareholders of Next Mobile a year ago.

The deal provided that the five companies would acquire the listed production company by pouring in assets into PEP in exchange for shares. In turn, PEP would own Next Mobile, which would have been the radio-listed operator's backdoor listing.

But the deal between PEP and Nextel pushed through, it would have provided a takeover play for their investors.

It seems, however, said that the deal between PEP and Next Mobile had lapsed as early as October 2004.

"At that time, the stock market wasn't doing as well as we saw no need to renew the deal," said a source from Next Mobile.

The same source said that the share swap was discouraged by the securities that PEP was classified as a media company and therefore, could not entertain foreign investors. Next Mobile is partly owned by foreign groups.

PEP had forged the agreement last year with Top Rhea Enterprises Ltd., Jumbotek Holdings Ltd., Gamboa Holdings Inc., Emerald Investment Inc., Pendennis Industries and Sha Keying Inc.

These five companies controlled by businessman Mel Velarde also own Next Mobile Inc.

The parties entered into an agreement where the five Next Mobile shareholders shall assign to PEP 12,962,536 common shares of the stock radio company in exchange for the issuance by PEP of 33,164,151,042 common shares.

Upon completion of the swap, PEP would have owned 97 percent of the outstanding capital stock of Next Mobile. In turn, the five Mobile shareholders would have acquired 96.2 percent of the outstanding capital stock of the listed production company. "There has been no assignment of Next Mobile shares to PEP and PEP has not issued any shares to the Next Mobile shareholders," Uno said in a disclosure.

The company wanted to expand its presence in more than 30 key cities in the country. The network's rebirth as well as improvement of varieties would entail about P1.4 billion.

DISCLOSURES

SM Prime Holdings Inc. will hold its annual stockholders' meeting on April 26, 2 p.m. at the Mall Ballroom, Makati Shangri-La Hotel, Makati City. Stockholders of record as of March 28 are entitled to notice of and to vote at the meeting.

* * *

Vulcan Industrial and Mining Corp. signed the notes operating agreement with Philippine Mining Corp. for the development of its Palawan claims.

* * *

A. BROWN Co. Inc. bought on March 11 a total of 316,424 SMC shares at the rate of P1.00 per share.

* * *

UNION Bank of the Philippines said in notified the bank is considering to unload some 4,900 unlisted shares of foreclosed assets this year through its own property auction or by entering into joint venture projects with developers.

* * *

PHINMA Energy Resources Corp. will hold its annual stockholders' meeting on May 27, 1:30 p.m. The venue will be announced soon. Record date for stockholders entitled to vote at the said meeting is June 27.

* * *

SALCON Power Corp. will hold its annual stockholders' meeting on May 31, 9:30 a.m. at the Manila Polo Club, McKinley Road, Forbes Park, Makati. Stockholders of record as of April 20 are entitled to vote at the said meeting. *Compiled by Ace Leyesa, PDI Research*

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2-month

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likewise intensified which supports collection recovery effort and the filing of criminal charges against tax evaders," the BIR said in a statement.

The BIR added that President Macapagal-Arroyo would launch within this month the BIR-BSP (Boy Scout of the Philippines) and Coalition Against Corruption of the "Operation Dikit" where some 600,000 boy scouts all over the country would affix BIR stickers in an estimated one million cash register and point of sales machines to ensure the monthly submission of gross receipts from these machines.

The boy scouts will be deputized by the BIR as tax police and will be tapped to distribute flyers explaining the mechanics of the electronics sales reporting system.

Manila

From page B1

After the offering, the Ayala group's interest in the utility firm slid to 30.2 percent from 45.12 percent. The holdings of the International Finance Corp. fell to 7.4 percent from 12.32 percent and that of Mitsubishi Corp. fell to 7.9 percent from 13.13 percent. Britain's United Utilities raised its common shareholdings to 11.7 percent from 9.01 percent. It also holds preferred shares in the firm equivalent to 16.7 percent.

"It is truly an honor for Manila Water to be the country's first international IPO listing since 1997. We feel this is very significant because it signals renewed confidence of international investors in the Philippine equities market and in the country's overall outlook," MWCI chair Fernando Zobel de Ayala said yesterday.

"We believe we managed to go in at the right time," Aquino said in a briefing with reporters last Thursday.

Aquino said the company's international roadshow, the country's first IPO roadshow since 1997 generated $910 million worth of orders, or 15 times oversubscribed.

The primary offer raised about P3.6 billion in new funds for MWCI, which will be used for capital investment and expansion plans, Aquino said.

The cash inflow will be used to finance continued improvements in its concession and its pipe-laying programs in the next few years.

MWCI will spend about P3 billion this year, almost the same as its budget for capital expenditure in the previous years.

Aquino said MWCI would undertake expansion in the Northern part of Manila (Montalban, San Mateo), East (Taytay, Cainta, Antipolo, Binangonan, Baras, Hala-Hala), and the South (Taguig, Pateros).

MWCI controls the east zone which covers major business districts such as Makati City, most of Quezon City, Pasig City, Marikina, San Juan, Taguig and Mandaluyong City.

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PHILTOWN

BUSINESS

VAT issue feared to drag peso down

By Doris C. Dumlao

MANILA—Senate Majority Leader Francisco Pangilinan said he was confident the VAT bill would be passed soon and the government's economic team's move to speed up the passage of the tax bill.

The lead currency, which rallied to the 53.00-53.10 level early this week, shed 22 centavos yesterday to close at 54.24 from Thursday's finish of 54.2.40.

Worries over the delay in or the watering down of the VAT reform package into dragged down local stocks yesterday despite the listing of market favorite Manila Water Co., with the main stock Philippine Stock Exchange dropping by 0.37 percent or about 58 points to 2,650.08.

A stock market trader said foreign investors sold down local stocks because they were worried that the VAT package would not get Congress' approval.

"We are monitoring it week closely with the senators as we can address their questions and issues regarding VAT," Pangilinan said in a statement.

"There is an agreement in the need to consolidate our fiscal position and the enactment of the VAT bill not only in consolidating our fiscal position but also in strengthening the confidence of the international finance community," he said.

Economists expressed concern that if the VAT package were not passed soon, the market would penalize the peso—which has been living on optimism now—the pivotal macroeconomy.

"If the VAT bill were not passed, the peso would really drop," Ramonsantos said.

The sell-down of local stocks yesterday translated to huge demand for dollars as banks covered short positions ahead of a long Lenten break next week.

The peso traded between an intra-day high of 53.10-53.01 and low of 54.36. Yesterday's turnover was $461.1 million.

A foreign exchange trader said: "We are wants to bet against the dollar at this time. The odds are high for a peso correction just by looking at the fundamentals."

The trader cited the delay in the ongoing deliberations on the VAT bill—the focal point of President Macapagal-Arroyo's tax reform package—due to political bickering.

First Quadrant, JC Martin avoid pyramiding charges

By Ramon W. Cheringo

MULTI-LEVEL marketing firms First Quadrant (Philippines) Inc. and JC Martin Corp. avoided charges of engaging in pyramiding schemes after they entered into "mediation agreements" to improve their marketing plans, according to the Department of Trade and Industry.

Trade Assistant Secretary J. Norman H. Hocson said in a press briefing the two firms agreed to refine their business plans as required by the DTI to "ensure ample protection for consumers."

"There was no conclusive determination that one made an admission or one they were indeed engaged in pyramiding since the case did not go beyond mediation stage," he said.

"Such determination is only possible if there was a failure of mediation and the case is referred to adjudication," he added.

Hocson said FQPI and JC Martin both consented to remove "any references to the encouragement of earning through recruitment" in company materials like catalogs, brochures and sales kits as well as business opportunity meetings and conventions conducted.

The reason that the companies should not make any mention in incidences or possible earnings through recruitment is because "it is illegal," he said.

Hocson said FQPI and JC Martin both consented to remove "any references to the encouragement of earning through recruitment" in company materials like catalogs, brochures and sales kits as well as business opportunity meetings and conventions conducted.

The reason that the companies should not make any mention in incidences or possible earnings through recruitment is because "it is illegal," he said.

Under Executive Order No. 913, which includes an order to stop illegal pyramiding operations, a fine of between P50,000 and P1,500,000 plus a maximum of P1,000 for each day of violation, cancellation or suspension of permits from and registration with the DTI, and damages.

Luisita sugar mill shuts down

By Elizabeth L. Sandoval

PUBLICLY-LISTED Central Azucarera de Tarlac has formally suspended its sugar milling operations to open further hours following a strike that started last May 4.

In a disclosure to the Philippine Stock Exchange (PSE), CADT corporate secretary Jocelin Lopez said the company entered income operations "because the strikers refuse to return to work and continue to obstruct access to the premises of the Central, preventing non-striking employees to report for work."

Lopez added that CADT was willing to resume operations and give to the returning employees, strikers and non-strikers alike their usual work as provided by the order by the Department of Labor.

The mill has not operated since Nov. 3, due to the strike.

"The operations of CADT has been completely paralyzed since the onset of the illegal strike and has exacerbated the already debilitating financial condition of the company," Lopez said.

CADT legal counsel and Fiscalia's Lianto two president for external affairs Vigor Mendoza meanwhile told the business that the company has suffered losses losses of roughly P7 million a day to present since the all the last November.

He estimated CADT has some P1 billion over the five months that workers were on strike.

CADT operates a sugar mill and a refinery within the sprawling 5,200 hectare Hacienda Luisita property in Tarlac owned by Jaime Cojuangco and his immediate relatives.

The sugar mill processes sugarcane into sugar, while the refinery produces alcohol.

CADT employs roughly 900 workers, which include both union members and management.

"I have faith in the new non-unionist managing to. We hope to operate at full capacity tomorrow and the season will be fruitful. We are very optimistic it will bear fruit," Mendoza said.

LRTA to bid out ad management

By Clarissa S. Batino

THE LIGHT Rail Transit Authority will open for bidding a five-year contract to manage the advertising spaces along the rail lines.

LRTA administrator Mel Robles said the agency was looking to award the contract to a group that would bring in at least P40 million in net revenues annually.

Robles said that the railway agency has lately been getting about P25 million annually from the sale of advertising spaces within the Line 1 that stretches from Monumento in Caloocan.

The operation of Line 2 running from Recoletos in Pasig to Santa in Manila slightly boosted advertising sales.

The 18 stations of Line 1 stretches from Monumento to Baclaran, while the 11 stations of Line 2 runs from Santolan in Pasig to Recto in Manila.

An average of 350,000 passengers ride the Line 1 daily, while about 140,000 on the Line 2.

Robles said more than 30 groups have expressed interest to bid for the LRTA advertising contract.

"We have set a floor price of P40 million. We could get more than that compared to the P25 million currently that we have been getting," the LRTA chief told reporters.

Robles said revenue from rail operations would increase by almost 7% percent this year to about P2.9 billion, against P2.66 billion in 2004, even without a P.50 fare increase.

But even if the LRTA could include projected fare collection of about P146 million this year, the railway agency would still be short of funds to settle about P3.4 billion in maturing debt in 2005, he said.

Robles said this was why the LRTA would like to implement a P.50 fare increase in the coming months.

From White to Warmth

KULIT CO.

KC Concepcion

THINGS looked warm behind a pair of rose-colored-flea-market lenses on Valentines month. Yes, I did blow through days alone hiding behind the disguise of artificial vibrancy, throwing caution to the wind despite the semi-icy cobblestone streets of the city.

This was to be the first time I were to spend the month of love with only the company of some mushy OPM music, and a family of healthy pigeons who had their own baguette-crumb fiestas around my feet as people rushed in and out of boulangeries to prepare the munchies for their romantic feasts.

Valentine's day itself was the day that I unintentionally set up to be exceptionally for Me, for which my thoughts darted from one accomplishment to another in sheer delight. Although I would have liked to have a male companion spend some time with me to feel slightly more feminine (I can't decide whether to blame or thank my lutyas for robbing me of the word 'dainty') I just had so many things in my head that day that the poor thing would have probably ended up jumping into the River Seine hoping to be saved from some highly emotional blabber!

Which got me thinking... If one likes to THINK intensely, it does not necessarily mean one would SPEAK intensely. But if one does happen to LIKE talking, sometimes, that's just the way you process your thinking. And spontaneous thoughts, as well as blabber, might never make it to The Economist, but may be placed in a corner somewhere like this one (for example), not merely because of the name of who is writing it, but because life is known by everyone, processed in the heart and mind in different ways, and in a journey like yours, there will always be that wish for that somebody to take your hand along the way.

For temporary senselessness to serve the art of laughter and to relish your version of the good life, or for world-moving moments, and whatever else an experience is worth, you hope that there will always be someone who'll say "I know how this feels" and prove they actually mean it.

Is this why people like to live their own publicly private corners in cyberspace?

The universe of Blog is enormous. Topics range from complex footwear engineering to painful broken toenails; life at war to death in the streets.

There are escapists, critics, soldiers, rockers, professors, feminists, lovers, hackers,15-year-olds going on 25, or 45-year-old beach bums regressing to adolescent mode. Live journals are everywhere, and every day people post a piece of them onto a computer screen for everyone to see.

Do we do this just because it's fun? Or because, whether it be to drown in tears or take a chunk of something fabulous, we don't want

REmember/B; C2

From White to Warmth

So how to bring it alone?

For all we know, we might be marketing something to ourselves, as much as we are to others. It could be for the literal reason of willing something to make profit, or just because you desire to create a story through which you can see everything for more or less than it really is.

A scratch on the lens

Some people may look through a pair of pink glasses and think "well this is ridiculous. Who would want to see us in monotone?"

Maybe others would say "there's a scratch on the lens." Or there may be people who might just like to let themselves go into this modern picture of pink that has them watching the world for a while outdoors actually needing to exist in it.

Whatever it is, there has got to be some reason why we might take part of our privacy and encourage the public to take a like. Whatever happened to having a handful of close friends to tell everything to? are computer screens really beginning to replace real or is this a way to take cover from the outside evolving more to the inside?

"I've learned to let go of my camera, and stop experiencing things in pixels. I wanted to be in the moment and live in it with all senses," a friend once said.

Both the Filipino and the French have this natural focus on food and drink as a way of socializing and staying in touch. But the difference is that, if the Filipino culture is to preserve the merrier idea of a classic social circle bonding session, the French seem to be more collectively intimate.

And though not all things are what they seem, it's true that a girl on this side of town will more likely have a much smaller living space than one in Bgy. Kapitolyo, but it is more like you've just stepped into a luxurious chocolate commercial. And no matter how broke or "poor" she is, get-togethers will always happen for the sake of keeping a type of bond, and it's always curious how elaborate parties are thrown in even the most cramped apartments that are up at the top floor in a building with no elevator.

Sensual liberty

Things are also always done with style, as in a hot journal... but the French way is in theme. how much intimacy to let into the space by modelling with design and by necessity. This becomes the space where everybody begins to eat at the same time (encouraged if—not more than the one beside you), where there is a sensual liberty for the music down to the cigarette smoke in the room, and where what you do or is living is never an important part of the conversation (a faux pas even for good friends).

In a corner you will find two friends that have just met, talking about the latest football match with a cocktail in hand, in another, a group of three that are both agreeing and disagreeing on the value of a film or novel (virtue meaning both profundity and entertainment), and the honest youth tasting on a pillow by the front door, exhausted from having gone around to socialize with guests earlier in the evening.

You will also find that a woman here is probably less afraid of getting old, and that she never ceases to give much of herself away when it comes to dealing with personal issues.

There is never a need to define things up front, allowing things instead to evolve genuinely and naturally. She has a sensual relationship between her body and the food she brings to it. She can have a modest three-course meal and a glass of champagne all alone if, between her ideas of politics and culture, between her grandmother's pair of earrings and her own simple bracelet.

In this space, everything is warm and gracious, and it doesn't take a whole lot of people or fanfare to elevate one space to find it.

By the end of the month, despite the fact that, STILL, this modern world of technology found a way to make me come home with a memory card that stubbornly snapped out to capture its vie (quite literally) en rose, saving a splash of pink to sum up the white-sky monochromatic reality does affect dispositions, without having to hide behind the disguise of bright, pre-summer Spring colors was much needed.

So much love

I no longer felt an alone despite having nobody's hand to distract with my own. There was so much love and warmth in everything—two little girls bonding over a tay top (hardly ever seen anymore in familiar households), two sleepy, relaxed bestial brother pupe resting unconcerned with each other in a pet shop, a pigeon bathing in the wash sun, a Filipino couple walking from China Town with a bag of ingredients that looked fabulously familiar (think Bare Bare or Malgang's or even in the thought that the wisely consumerism level of hubby the lobster made it on the MOB menu!

Although the conversation ranks of thought scattered all over the web might never make it on traditional newspapers, anyone's stories are equally worth being paid attention to.

So next time what is being said, there is a reason behind the gesture, and for us to listen to each other, as well as listen to ourselves—what your body is trying to tell you, or what your brain is pushing you to think, or what your heart is trying to get you to feel—is to stay connected.

Old-fashioned

Although live journals are an interesting way to keep track of friends, life and times, there is still that old-fashioned manner of living that does not as all require the help of a computer.

Don't forget that you are free to do whatever you want with your space outside of a mundane where everything is just fabulously tangible. Where you get wrapped within the hug you once asked for where the birds fly up high and come back down to food, where you SEE the chuckles and HEAR the heart that has fallen in (or out of, God forbid) love.

Knowing what's going on in each others lives remotely no than necessary where we are, who we are, or what we have become, we are all human, sharing the same moon, beautiful, twisted world where whatever fears one's bear will be shot, which woke one's cradle.

with upon a silver cloud ..... traveling across the mountaintops

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Manure *Panis* Guy

Dear Man About Town,

I've saved enough money to buy a new cell phone. Should I buy the newest Nokia, or the Ericsson, or should I hoop on saving until I have enough cash to get a Treo 650?

Man about town

Chuck Dy

Dear Manure Panis Guy,

Hi! I'm waiting in line at Coffee Bean one morning along with other caffeine manufacturers, when an old classmate from years back spots me. We venture into and introduce me to his friend, a work colleague from the province. I am pleasantly surprised to find out that, since [illegible] in my old classmate, his friend is a big fan of my humble columns. I've never met one big fan, just my mother). His weight out [illegible] challenge, this supposed "fan" hadn't said anything to [illegible]

Curiosity is, at best, an exercise in selective and at this moment, I was nothing but curious about the situation. A total stranger, who purported to be an admirer, had just called me, on my style of writing, the stuff of outright fetishism. Criticism is part and parcel of the industry, but at [illegible] morning, before the first sip of coffee, are before the hell conditions. If my biggest fan thought I wrote crap for a living, what did my detractors think of my style? Mixplup, he was right, and my abilities as a writer had been greatly exaggerated by the charity of kind friends. Or possibly I did have a modicum of talent but my topics were irrelevant and outdated, like pinoy manzan. Oh it could be that.....

"He reads your columns every Saturday," my classmate interrupted my runaway train of thought, "and he always says the same thing about you: Man, you're the Jasmine guy."

Communication breakdown

Communication has ever been a tricky concept, a linewish of human evolution that depends on the quality of the source and the empathy of the audience. Anything that involves more than one entity a subject to disaster and the very definition of communication presupposes a plausibly. Contrary to a mangling of Zen, one does not communicate with one's self; that is called introspection). In fact, the brief history of human existence can be summarized by any attempts to overcommunicate with one another, highlighted by the various triumphs and tragedies resulting from our efforts to be understood. The great inventions that have propelled mankind forward—from the Gutenberg press to the internet—are all tools of exhaustive conveyance. The notable foibles of history are likewise offspring of communication gone awry. How many disputes were instigated by a handicap of accent or language? How many wars could have been averted if people sat down face-to-face? How many jolly slaughters would have been spared a listen to of turbulent Presidential references if only JFK had been tutored in better Ilocano?

The fantastic irony of this phenomenon is that it is extremely difficult to justify our gains in the harsh light of our losses. We

PANORAMA C2

Semana Santa is coming to town!

WITH the approach of Semana Santa, one of the Christian world's holiest seasons, expect the whole metropolis to resemble a ghost town. Most restaurants, bars and theaters will be closed for several days. TV (at least the regular free TV stations) and radio will go off the air. Think "The Day After Tomorrow." Many families will take full advantage of the holidays to take that oft postponed trip out of town. Think "National Lampoon's European Vacation." Metro Manila on this rare occasion will be a driver's and pedestrian's paradise, with very few cars on the road and crowds and traffic jams virtually extinct. Again, think "The Day After Tomorrow." The serene and tranquil pace and the absence of urban chaos will be a welcome respite for my soul. Awww...

For those who will be staying in town, there will still be live band performances in favorite watering holes except from March 24 to March 25. We recommend Conspiracy [59 Visayas Ave., Project 6, Quezon City, Tel. 453-2170] for alternative bands that perform their original music. 70's Bistro however will be closed from March 21 to 26. The other live entertainment venues that host many cover bands include Dish [The Loop, ELJ Center, ABS-CBN Compound, Mother Ignacia St., Tel. 413-0603, 413-0614], Ratsky [243 Tomas Morato St. cor. Scout Ponteberlla, Tel. 373-9881 to 83] and Metro Bar [47 West Ave., Tel. 374-7505] all in Quezon City. All the choirs are also gonna be busy in Church, if you care to see them.

In Makati, we have Tavern On The Square [2/F Greenbelt 3, Ayala Center, Makati City, Tel. 757-4484], The Conservatory at The Peninsula Manila, [corner of Ayala and Makati Avenues, Tel. 810-3456, 812-3456] and Strumm's [110 Jupiter St., Bel-Air, Tel. 895-4636] and the streets of P. Burgos for entertainment.

The venues in Manila that offer live bands include Ratsky [1663 J. Bocobo St., Malate, Tel. 523-8608 to 10] and Suburbia [Alonzo Cor. Adriatico Streets, Malate, Tel. 450-1685/86, 523-9760, 400-5328].

Although 24/7 has compiled many events for this week, we urge you to confirm the operating schedules of the venues before making any plans.

24/7

Janine Cuenca-Dario

March 19, Saturday

Quezon City and neighboring city Marikina will play host to big rock acts. Current sensation Kitchie Nadal will be at ABS-CBN party place for Unicef at 10:00 p.m. then proceeds to the Marikina Sports Complex for Rockista Reloaded at 1:00 a.m. with bands like Session Road. Mongols led by former Eraserheads frontman Ely Buendia is the featured band at Dish. Folk artist Bayang Barrios will perform at Conspiracy. Jazz aficionados should not miss Johnny Alegre and Affinity at the Shangri-la Plaza.

March 21, Monday

Again, it's at Conspiracy where you find great alternative artists. Tonight, it is Gary Granada. Greenbelt 3 offers Freestyle at Tavern on the Square or Romy Posadas & Bernie Uy at Merk's.

March 22, Tuesday

It is early in the week but many sought after bands are performing with MYMP at Tavern on the Square, the energetic Hyperbeat at Ratsky Manila, Spirit of 67 at the Captain's Bar for a dose of the happy 60s music, mainstay showband Cruzin' Band at Merk's and Side A at 19 East, Sucat.

March 23, Wednesday

The inspiring Noel Cabangon will be at Conspiracy while 70's band Kearney Street at Strumm's. You have one more chance to catch Side A this evening at Tavern on the Square. Yes, they are still alive!

March 24 and 25, Thursday and Friday

Since most establishments will be closed, you may want to explore a part of the city that you have rarely seen. Check out the restored walled city of Intramuros, the site of two cavernous and historic churches, the Manila Cathedral and San Agustin Church. Several Catholic Filipinos will gather here to do their Visita Iglesia or traditional Easter visit of the churches. I sound like Susan Calo-Medina. You may want to walk on the walls and appreciate structures that span four centuries. I sound like Cory Quirino. Other churches to check out in Manila are the San Sebastian Church, known as the only all steel church in Asia and the Las Piñas church that houses the Bamboo organ. I sound like Father Reuter.

Schedules may change without prior notice. Email your skeds every Wednesday to e-mail address events@mag24-7.com and mag24_7@yahoo.com or fax number 892-0689.

Manure *Panis* Guy

From page C3

have indeed proven to have the most exquisite brains on this planet by developing our means of communication to such a comprehensive extent in a relatively short time to have impressed every other organism on Earth if they could so wish to care. A mere five thousand years after papyrus, we're surfing cyberspace while other mammals are still marking their territory with pee. We've got phones and gadgets with enough processing power to launch a nuclear warhead. We have media outlets of ridiculous proportions, enough to saturate every sensory receiver in the body a hundred times over. Yes, we are so very far removed from our animal brethren, closer in propinquity to Godliness in terms of approaching omniscience.

But in our quest for divinity, have we forsaken our humanity? A thousand channels of television and most of them are following the Michael Jackson trial as if the verdict will reveal the mysteries of the universe. Cellular phones so smrat thely've got memberships in MENSA, have dminished our speling abilitys to Neanderthal levels. And the Internet, the most incredible tool for human communication possibly ever conceived, is a technology driven by the likes of Paris Hilton and Pamela Anderson giving blondes an even worse name. Yes, we may soon know everything there is to know, and not know a thing about how to use it properly. Knowledge without wisdom, my friends, is like having sex with an idiot—it's just f**king stupid. But I digress.

Speak easy

The point being that just because we communicate with impressive complexity doesn't mean we understand each other any better. The opposite must be true, in that the simplest means are usually the most effective.

The advent of illusory diplomacy oft labeled political correctness makes this simplicity a dangerous option, though. No longer can I just say, "I just bought a bootleg CD of Michael Jackson from that fat, black midget in the squatter area." Instead, I'd have purchased an illegal copy of an album by the suspected-but-not-as-of-yet-convicted music artist Michael Jackson from the gravity-encouraged, vertically challenged, tint-pigmented vendor located in the economically depressed region of the city. This way, I offend only common sense.

Great confusion

Aside from the necessities of modern tact, advances in technology have likewise caused great confusion in the communication lines. A telephone's main purpose used to be the brief exchange of information. Now, the exchange is anything but brief, and it can hardly be classified as information. The Philippines alone generates millions of dollars in text messages every year and most of them consist of lame testaments of affection, terrible jokes, or bizarre squiggles called Emoticons (which I originally imagined as a branch of Transformer robots that fought alongside the Autobots versus the evil Decepticons.) The cellular phones of today can surf the Internet remotely, take pixilated photos of a couple "doing it in the bathroom of Venezia, *pare*", and even supply you with your daily horoscope. Actual conversation is incidental.

But these are but stories in the Babel Tower, and as long as we stray from the formula of simplicity, we will never fully understand one another.

So as to your question, I have decided NOT to answer it. There are technical authors more equipped and authorized to furnish you with a better answer. But more importantly, I DON'T CARE. Not that it's a dumb question, just beyond my realm of interest. Like a phone call from a former relationship that ended in a sour note, I'd rather not answer. What I have chosen to do instead is to answer the question you DIDN'T ask, but SHOULD'VE. How do we communicate better?

Effectiveness vs. efficiency

And the answer, so obvious and obscured, is to speak clearly and listen carefully. On paper, it may appear remarkable that we have moved from smoke signals to email, but progress is determined by effectiveness more than efficiency. Certainly it is a great convenience to be able to receive messages from a loved one instantly from across the globe, but if it achieves ambiguity because he or she forgot to punctuate it with a smiley face, then mankind is in a lot of trouble.

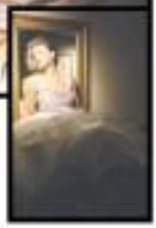
Nokias, Eriksons, and Treos, oh my!

So speak clearly, with your own distinct voice, in the comfort of your own linguistic reach, and say what you mean to say, unhindered by political correctness, but sensitive to your audience's limitations and experience. So listen carefully, digesting every word, accommodating of whatever the message may be, prepared to invite debate but unrestricted by our own belief system.

And that's all there is to it. Nokia, Eriksson, Treo: These are not better tools for communication, just fancier ones. The next World War will probably be triggered by a tragic inanity of miscommunication, such as P. Diddy accidentally insulting Jacques Chirac by calling him a "phat French brother." In such an occasion, I would suggest buying a Treo because it is heavier and can be used as a missile weapon.

To my number one fan, if you're reading, for my lack of comic relief this week, I apologize that I wasn't the *panis* guy. But then again, hopefully I wasn't manure either.

(email author at bohemiansamurai@yahoo.com)



She hangs with George, Jericho and Superl's James and Pepe

The Made-Up Adventures of Princess VJ Paula

By James Gabrillo, Pepe Diokno, and Princess VJ Paula

CHANNEL [V] VJ Paula Mabé All has had "the loveliest two days" here in the Philippines. The thing is, she hasn't been around—she's been locked in studios and hotel rooms her whole stay in the metro by a weird Russian guy named Rasputin-ish. One night, she dream off in her big poofy dress (see pictures), and dreams of a day all alone—with no one to help her—in Metro Manila. (Cue harp sound.)

"Hello?" VJ Paula picks up the phone and presses it against her... no. She is in the posh of floor of Channel [V].

"Hello, VJ Paula!" It is George W. Bush—who yes, has just made a rhyme. ("Who... is ... a super?")

"George, George, George..."

"Who else are you on the phone with? Who is George?"

"George, what do you want now?"

"You... have to be at a photo shoot in Manila two hours from now." (He hummed a whole new tune! Do not forget this is a dream.) "If you do not make it, I will shoot you...ahaha... haha... ha. Why was I laughing?"

"You know do I get there?"

"Limousine."

"Okay."

Paula's molecules zoom through the teleportation high-way thing, and arrives at the Ninoy Aquino International Airport 11 852 seconds later. She arises out of the old, dirty airport and says, "I should have flown SIA."

She is greeted at the gate by a thirty-something man with a pedicab. "You were very fortunate with AK," he says. "Get into the pedicab!" he orders.

They speed off into... Metro Manila Traffic.

After an hour on the road, staring at three-wood pink fences, the pedicab-driving hidago has to stop because, and dirty part of town called... Rockwell. Just kidding. He hangs her to a... motel! (Cue lightning soundtrack—we don't know how many Ts there are in Ngaing, so we just put a lot.)

Paula jumps out of the pedicab and looks the man in the hole.

"Aha!" he says, and digs into his pockets. "I have a cup!" He takes it out and shows her.

"This is the Opside!" she screams, and kicks him again.

He falls to the ground, dead.

VJ Paula, using her intellectual prowess and discovery skills, realizes... she's in a dingy, dirty part of Manila and she doesn't have money at all. She checks her watch—she has an hour to get to the photo shoot. She doesn't even know where it is.

So, in an act of total creativity, she takes out guns and guns from her pocket, and starts threatening her heart out. People start to retreat around her...not because of the noise, but because she looks foreign. ("Sorry! It Heaven did Material!") They shower her with money and gifts. She makes two grans (minus conversionary ex and VAT).

Just then, George W. Bush makes up and says, "Yes, grands, I didn't tell her where it at" be he sends one of his minions. Jericho Rosales of the Hunks and Ben "Jaire" to save her.

"I will save you," says Jericho, and looks down at his script.

"Are you that guy from the soft drink ad...Asaro. Timberlake?" she asks.

"No. I am Jericho Rosales. My show is big in Malaysia. It's called 'Fatigoko Ito Ito.'"

"Oh yeah, my hair does you—she's gonna have a baby soon and she's going to name it after one of the characters. Mao to save you—now take off your clothes." (Remember this is a dream.)

"You're very crazy" he replies.

"Okay."

VJ Paula is ushered to her photo shoot in Ikea (see pictures—look, Paula's super cute now... they have looks!)

This is where her dream ends. She wakes up, looks at the clock and says, "Oh my Allah (she's Muslim), I have an interview!"

How was your flight?

I had a Pinoy seatmate who was trying to hit on me (for whole time—and I had earphones on! He just wanted to talk to me because I'm so cute.

What was the first thing you noticed when you got here?

How rude everyone is... and there are a lot of billboards.

Do you know any Filipino?

I know how to count in Filipino. It's important to swear.

We heard you grew up with a Filipina helper?

Yeah. She's been with us for 10 years. She taught me how to swear in Tagalog. She also makes good adobo—chicken adobo.

Know any Filipino celebrities?

I went to ABS-CBN to interview... Jericho Rosales. I asked him to take off his clothes, and he says like, "You're so crazy." And I am crazy. I'm to be feared.

How long have you been with Channel [V]?

About three years.

Who are your favorite musicians?

Prince and Queen. I'm a '70s child, that's why I love '80s music.

What pisces you off?

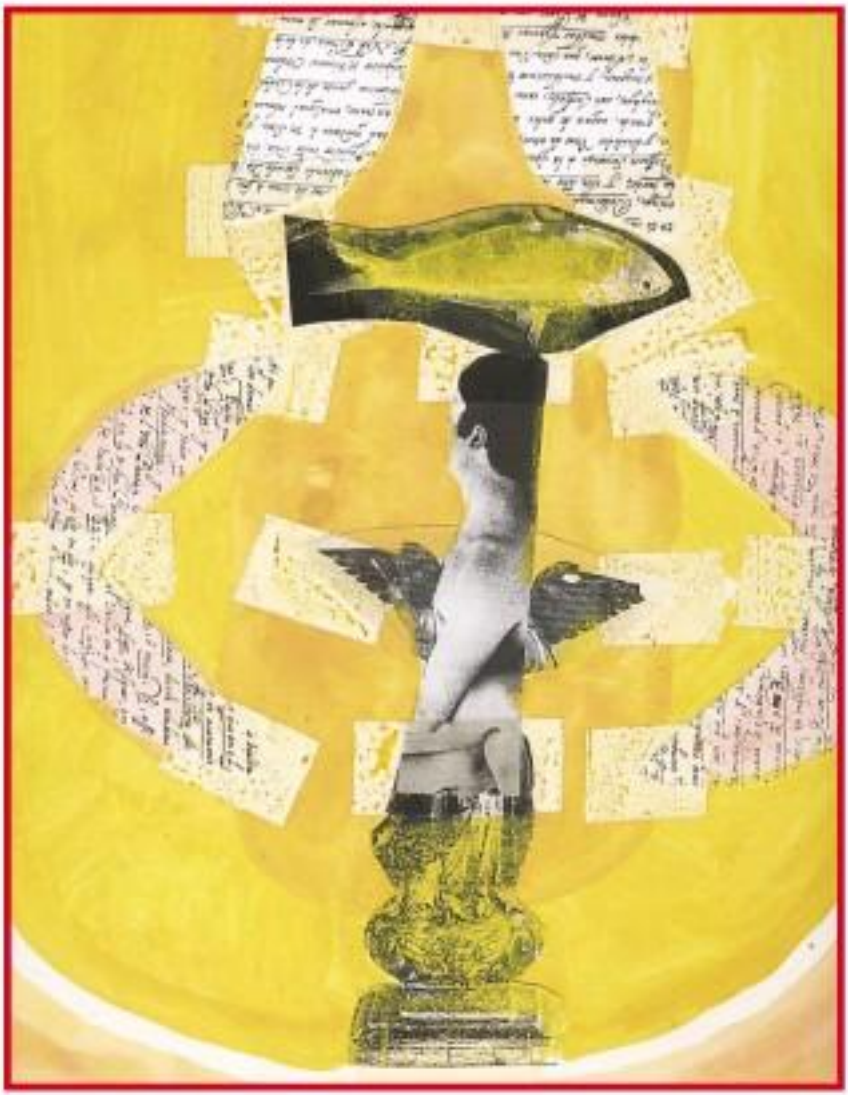
Mean-spirited people who try and chastise with their feelings.

What does your super hair straw might sweeten off?

A lovely meal with my funniest friends...I'm a "foodie."

What makes you Super?

That's a lovely question. (Thinks)... (Thinks...) A large scrambled, with salted egg on top.



Pimp your life

This Easter, step out of your usual (party) zone and upgrade yourself one tiny act of penance at a time

By Gloria de la Paz
Original artwork by Jason Moss

BEHARE of idle hands, Christians. More than oppressive weather, dread out cutouts or the ides of March, boredom can make thee do strange things. I found myself in this torture-filled stratosphere recently so allow me to expound on it as Jesus did in the Gospels. Well, sort of.

On the one hand, when boredom is beheaded by Daddy's Amex and copious amounts of vodka, it can lead to seven minutes of unsophisticated sexual wrestling up in a puddle of vomit (yours). Or you pulling things up your nose, or co-ed wedding that you just learned in your own sex tape video. Guaranteed! Email me for full. *Confession #1.*

On the other hand, when a feeling of restlessness is combined with a quiet religious pep talk and a double shot of espresso, it can turn into motivation. Which can lead to great things. Which can lead to, ahem, eternal salvation. Hallelujah.

So in case your New Year's resolution have gone the way of the Old Testament, fear not. Jesus also embodies new life, right? So pimp with Jesus Christ, Elvis Gibson and the Easter Bunny. I have come up with some sins of commission that, although hilariously sinful, will definitely save your soul from the flames of Rotterdam.

Penance #1: Try abstaining from Internet porn. And more important, refraining off to internet porn. You're busted, Mr Hans Pärse!

Penance #2: Stop participating in chain e-mails. If you do, your eyeballs will explode.

Penance #3: Use fake swear words like "shoot," "figgle" or "fudge." Yeah, it's lame but hey, it's Lent and the power of Christ compels you. Shoot be damn sacrifice for sure. Oops.

Penance #4: Give up TV. Stop staring at Jessica Simpson's boobies in "Newlyweds" and send a letter to Without pictures. Like, for instance, the Bible.

Penance #5: Quit stalking friendsters. Start making real friends. And then pass for Kings, too. Enough already.

Penance #6: Forget swearing. It's a fact that repeated vow can lead to the Fat Controller in your synagogue, leading to chronic depression. A single act, however, will earn you in to nine in the people you hate for a few hours. This regulates some serious pruning.

Penance #7: Cut down on your vices. Whether it's alcohol, prescription drugs, gambling, impulse shopping or spending pump-ur STDs), try living without it for a day, or seven. Hum. Repeat.

It's a fact that Holy Week is cool, especially in a hardcore Catholic country like the Philippines. But think about it: being nailed to a cross isn't a total no-go by strike. There's a time and place to go rude, like your senior year in college, or all your without saying that Good Friday and Black Saturday are the break our inappropriate sexcapades in which to go long with the rock n' roll lifestyle. Be conscious of Christian etiquette and wear all the same weekend. Gabbing. (Where to, dude, however, not yourself. What would Jesus do? There you go, James.